

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

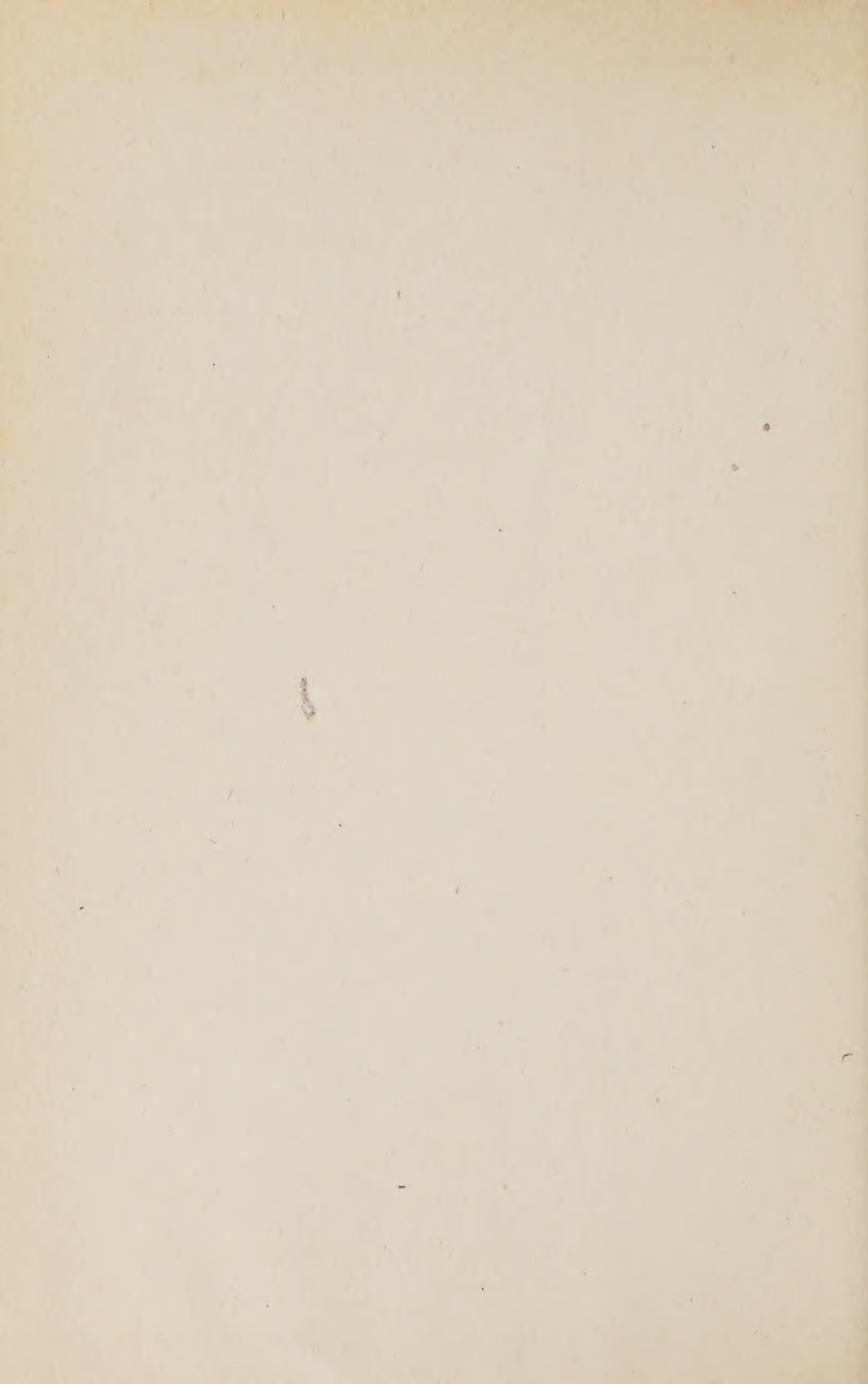
*Training and Service
for Executive Work*

*What Makes a
Good Letter**
Selling by Letter*

LA SALLE EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY
CHICAGO



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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Executive Manuals 79 and 80

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LETTER?—Being Executive Manual 79, on Business Correspondence, in a Complete Plan of Training and Service for Executive Work

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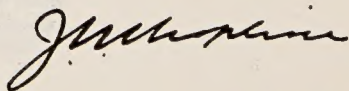
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WHAT MAKES A GOOD LETTER?

Part I

LETTER WRITING TO-DAY

THERE are two reasons why every business executive should have the ability to write good business letters. He will thereby greatly add to his personal success; and he will be able to train others to write good letters, which add much to the success of his house.

The importance of this ability to write good letters and also to train others to write them is far greater to-day than in former years, for fully half of all the business of the civilized world is now transacted by mail. The rapid increase in business letter writing is one of the wonders of our age. One rubber company has 1,900 employes who dictate letters. They produce 2,184,000 letters a year at a cost of about \$700,000. Another manufacturing house mails 40,000 letters a week. La-Salle Extension University sends out 20,000 pieces of mail matter a day. In the United States as a whole more than 1,500,000 letters are mailed every hour.

Nothing like this flood of letters has ever been known in the world before. In the old days, when business dealings were largely confined to one neighborhood, few letters were needed. To-day business dealings cover wide territories, and letters flow back and forth, here and there, in steady streams.

To-day, every business executive should have the ability to write good letters—which underlies ability to train others to write them.

This ability implies that an executive has a clear idea of the kind of letters that get results, and the kind that are likely to fail. Therefore, in this first executive manual on business correspondence, let us make sure that we understand what makes a good letter.

The Passing of Old-Fashioned Letters. Nothing in life is fixed; everything is constantly changing. When we turn back to the letters and speeches of men who lived seventy-five or one hundred years ago, we realize with a kind of shock how greatly the ideas of people have been altered. This is just as true in business as in everything else. The business methods of seventy-five years ago would not work at all in the twentieth century.

Think, for instance, of the various ways in which a man tried to win the respect of his fellow men seventy-five years ago. He tried to make people feel that he belonged to a superior class—that he was what was called a “gentleman.” His talk and his letters were full of high-sounding expressions and aristocratic ideas. He tried to be “elegant” in everything. If he was selling cheese and somebody ordered one hundred pounds, he would write, “Your valued order to hand, and same will have our most careful attention. Shipment will be made at the earliest possible moment, and we trust that the goods will give you complete satisfaction.”

He wrote in this way because he thought it would please the customer and make him respect the house. Everybody in business did the same thing, and it would have been considered very strange if a man had written simply and plainly, “I’m glad to have your order, and we are shipping the cheese.”

But things are changing. We still see many old-fashioned “elegant” letters, because it is hard to break old habits. But the people who really think about the matter nowadays are advocating a much plainer and simpler business letter.

The strongest men in the business world have mostly given up the attempt to be elegant, and are writing their letters in a natural, direct, and simple style.

It is a strange fact that the young beginners in business are usually the ones who write in the old-fashioned way, while the older ones have abandoned it. But, of

course, in some offices the younger men are converted to the newer style, while the officials still employ the old-fashioned formality.

It may be said in general, however, that the executives in most businesses are now convinced that simple and natural letter writing produces the best results; but that the men in subordinate positions find it easier to follow the old forms than to write in a more human way.

An Example of Simple, Natural Letter Writing. The Consumers Cigar Company, of Chicago, sold a consignment of cigars to a dealer. The amount of the bill was \$84.50. Apparently the cigars were satisfactory and the dealer had no complaint to make, but he forgot to send in the \$84.50. The collection department sent him the regular form collection letters, going straight thru the series in a routine way. The dealer did not reply.

It happened that the vice president of this company had made a special study of business letters, and he tried his hand on this collection case. He put himself, in imagination, in the position of the dealer, and tried to find some motive that he could play upon in order to get action. After talking with the salesman who sold the dealer the goods, he wrote the following letter, and had it signed by the salesman:

Dear Mr. Smith:

The other day, when I was passing thru your town, three of us traveling men were talking about customers. One of them mentioned you, and asked what I thought of you. Here is what I said:

"That man is as square as they make 'em."

I said this in spite of the fact that I knew your account with our house had been owing for more than a year. I have always judged men by first impressions. My first impression of you when I sold you was that you are square with a big "S," and I still hold that opinion.

I write this to you because I want you to know what I personally think of you when you get cross letters from our credit department. I don't know why you haven't paid that bill, but I know you will pay it, because I know that you are that kind of man.

Cordially yours,

That letter succeeded in getting a check for \$84.50 by return mail. It was utterly different from the kind of letters that had been sent to this man by the collection department, which were about like this:

We regret very much the necessity of having to call attention once more to your account, which is now several months overdue. Unless we hear from you within ten days, it will be necessary for us to refer the matter to our legal department, which will take the necessary steps to collect, etc.

The trouble with this kind of writing is that it does not express the real thought and feeling of any real person. It is a form that somebody has made in imitation of other forms, to be used on all occasions where payment has been delayed. The man who reads it gets no new ideas, he learns no interesting facts, and he does not feel that anyone is thinking in a particular way about him.

Compare it with the letter sent out over the salesman's signature. That letter was written in such a way that the dealer could not possibly think of it as a form letter. It was highly personal. It said frankly "I" and "You," and it talked of things that were interesting to the dealer—his personal reputation and the attitude of his friends and acquaintances toward him. It struck like a sword into the most sensitive part of his nature, and he could not be indifferent to it or treat it as an ordinary matter of business.

Making the letter simply and naturally express the real thought and feeling of the man who writes it is the most important thing in business letter writing to-day.

Nearly everybody who makes a special study of business letters finds that to be the great need of correspondents everywhere—to write with a simple, natural directness which is sincere and convincing in effect; to let naturalness of expression replace the artificial elegance of the old-fashioned letter.

The idea that a letter should be a formal document is a difficult one to get out of people's heads. A man who will talk with frankness and naturalness to another man

face to face, will usually dictate a formal and lifeless letter to that same man. When his attention is called to this, he agrees that the formality of his letter is really nonsense—but the force of habit is so strong that he returns to the formal style the moment he begins dictating again.

Let us here at the beginning of our training in good letter writing, make a careful analysis of this formal style, find out just what it is, how it came into existence, and how it does harm in practical letter writing. At the same time, we shall analyze and illustrate the advantages of the natural or informal style of writing letters. To develop ability to write simple and natural letters is our first objective in this division of our training service; then we shall take up the various situations that constantly arise, and see how they are handled by those who are able to write good letters. Our understanding of what makes a good letter will develop gradually as we go along.

Note: Thruout this section on business correspondence you will find many letters which serve to bring out forcefully the points presented in the text. In some instances you will notice a tendency to use the formality and the "business lingo" which most progressive letter writers taboo. However, since these are real letters, drawn from the files of active business concerns, we have thought it best not to alter them. After all, so-called "model letters" have an atmosphere of artificiality. We feel that you will find it much more interesting to study and analyze actual letters; to examine them, not only as to the specific points and principles which they illustrate, but also as to any shortcomings which they may possess.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LETTER?

Part II

THE BUSINESS LINGO

IMAGINE that you are the credit manager in a wholesale house. One of your customers is a small dealer in a near-by town. He is a pretty good customer, except that he is rather slow in his payments, and you are beginning to think that you will have to put a definite limit on the amount of goods that you let him have on credit. You have reminded him several times that he is running behind, but he does not seem to realize the seriousness of the situation.

One day he comes to your establishment to look over your samples, and picks out a good-sized order. Then he says to your salesman, "Send them right around, will you? I'm getting pretty low, and I want to make a display of them next week."

The salesman, knowing that this customer's account is in bad shape, asks him to step into your office and see you about the order. The dealer comes into your office and is introduced. You get up from your chair, smile cordially, extend your hand, and say, "Oh, yes. This is Mr. Gordon. Well, Gordon, how is everything going out at Cambridge? Take a chair. Here, take this one; it's more comfortable. Well, how is trade?"

"Oh, so-so," says Mr. Gordon, as he lays his hat on the top of your desk, and settles back in his chair. "I just dropped in to look over your latest stuff. It looks like things are picking up a bit out our way, and I was thinking of stocking up and making a better showing in the store. I'm a little behind in my payments—had a lot of special expenses lately. I've had the whole place redecorated; got an electric sign and one or two other little

things, and they are going to help business, I guess. Now, if you'll give me these things on your regular terms, I'll be in shape to move them, and that will give me a chance to catch up. See?"

The Language of Talk. What would you say in reply? Probably your answer would be something like this:

"Well, I'm glad to hear that things are picking up. We certainly have been thru a time of depression, haven't we; but I believe from now on things will be better. I was just looking over your account, and it struck me that it might be a good idea for us to talk the whole thing over and see what would be best for you and best for us. I am mighty glad you came in just now, because we can go over the whole situation and see just where we stand.

"I notice that your March and April invoices amount to \$1,127.32. We don't want you to feel that we are hurrying you, but you see this new order is going to bring the total above \$2,000, and I really don't believe you ought to carry that amount of indebtedness with your present volume of business.

"You see, we try to consider both sides of a matter like this. We want your business to be successful, and we don't want you to get into any trouble; and, on the other hand, we have to look out for the interests of our own business. Now in a case like this, your interests and ours are really the same. It wouldn't pay you in the long run to get far behind in your payments and it wouldn't pay us to let you do it.

"So here is what I have to suggest. Give us one thirty-day and one sixty-day note covering the amount now overdue; then we'll go ahead and fill this order on the usual terms. That will give you sixty days to catch up and we'll feel all right about it. What do you say?"

Such is the language of talk. Let's compare it with an old-fashioned business letter.

The Language of an Old-Fashioned Letter. The ordinary business correspondent would probably handle that same situation about like this:

Mr. C. H. Gordon
20 Main Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Gordon:

We regret to advise that we are unable to fill your order of the tenth inst. until a substantial payment is made on your previous indebtedness. We do not question your good intentions, and we are desirous of assisting you in every possible way in the development of your business, but it is not in accordance with good business practice to allow you to accumulate an indebtedness of more than \$2,000 in view of the present volume of your business.

The undersigned has discussed this matter with the sales manager, and he begs to assure you of his personal regret at being obliged to delay the filling of the above-mentioned order. He begs also to refer to his communication of the twenty-fifth ult. in which he called attention to the fact that your account is now several months in arrears. The statement inclosed herewith will show the exact status of your account.

Conforming to our regular practice, we are obliged to defer the filling of your esteemed order until we hear from you further. We would suggest that you give us two notes, one for thirty days and one for sixty days, covering the full amount of your past-due indebtedness, amounting to \$1,127.32, on receipt of which we shall be glad to give immediate attention to your order for new stock.

Thanking you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter and regretting that we cannot give you a more satisfactory reply to your favor of the tenth inst., we beg to remain

Very truly yours,

ARTHUR GRIGGS & COMPANY

Compare this old-fashioned letter point by point with the language of talk. It is quite different from natural, simple, and direct face-to-face language. Many of its expressions are not those that we would use in conversation—or anywhere except in a business letter. And what is its effect when used in a business letter?

The Effect of Old-Fashioned Business Lingo. The many stilted expressions in the foregoing letter destroy the sense of personal contact that helps so much in making a good business letter. They make the reader feel that

he is not dealing with another human being like himself, but with a kind of machine, or with rules and principles that were established long ago and have no relation to him personally.

The expressions, "we regret to advise," "the tenth inst.," "the undersigned," "begs to assure," "the above-mentioned order," "begs to refer," "communication," "the twenty-fifth ult.," "inclosed herewith," "conforming to," "your esteemed order," "thanking you in advance," "your favor," "beg to remain," are not used in talk, and most of them would not be used in any kind of writing, except business correspondence.

Those old moss-back expressions do not give the reader a fresh and interesting statement of the situation, but they make him feel that it is merely one of a thousand situations handled in about the same way. The reader feels that the writer has no very great interest in the matter; consequently, he himself will be inclined to have little interest when he reads such a letter.

A good letter is fresh and interesting in its expression of thought; it avoids the old-fashioned business lingo.

Suppose you were on a ship far out at sea and your craft should strike an iceberg and begin to sink. Suppose the radio operator said, "Write me a message and I will send it to any ship that may be near." Would you write, "We beg to advise that we are sinking. The undersigned accordingly requests that you come to our assistance at your earliest convenience."

The absurdity of sending so important a message in such formal language is apparent. It would take all the life and urgency out of your call for help—and such language takes all the urgency out of any request whatever.

Putting Talk into Letters. When we make our letters more like face-to-face talk, do we get the reader's respectful attention, or is he simply startled and amused? That is a fair question.

Suppose our letter to Mr. Gordon began like this:

Dear Mr. Gordon:

Well, I am glad to hear that things are picking up. We certainly have been thru a time of depression, haven't we?

Mr. Gordon might feel that we were surprisingly unconventional. But would he think the less of us for it? Putting talk into letters, however, does not require us to go that far in order to make our letters fresh and interesting.

The case we are considering is based on actual practice in a large wholesale house, and we are now ready to consider the letter that really was written. It was this:

Dear Mr. Gordon:

I have tried to convince myself in every way possible that it would be right for me to pass for shipment your order given to our Mr. Brown when he called upon you last week, but I simply can't do it until you have been able to reduce your present open account.

I know you will be disappointed, but I do not want you to feel at all hurt. It is not a question of confidence in you—our past relations show that. But it is simply not discreet in the present trade conditions to carry an open account of more than \$2,000 for a store doing your volume. I have been strongly tempted to put this order thru because of my great respect for you personally, but my better judgment tells me it would do neither of us any good.

I suggest that you send us a 30-day note for \$600 and a 60-day note for \$527.32. These two notes will cover your total account as shown on the inclosed statement. Then we can fill the present order at once.

This will be the easy way out of debt for you and safe for us; and I'm sure you will agree that what is safe credit for us to give is safe credit for you to take—anything over that is a bad indebtedness for you to have hanging over you in the present state of the market.

I know you will see the matter in this light, and will let me hear favorably from you as to the notes.

Yours faithfully,

Compare this letter with the one on page 8. Its language is quite different. It was written by a man who has made a special study of letter writing, and it brought back the reply desired mainly because it is fresh and interesting in the expression of its message.

The reader of a letter should be made to feel from the very start that the writer is talking to him and not sending him a collection of form paragraphs.

In the case of the letter just quoted the reader must have felt that he was being personally considered and that the whole letter was a real letter and not a mere piece of routine—because it is free from the business lingo of the old-fashioned, formal letter writer.

Another Example of Business Lingo. Let us now consider a letter that was made in the old-fashioned way, by a man who has never given any attention to effective letter writing. This letter was sent by a smelting and aluminum company in Detroit to a manufacturer of limousine bodies in Kalamazoo. It is copied exactly, except that the names are changed.

J. B. O'Connell Company
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Attention: Mr. R. C. Hansen

Gentlemen:

Beg to inquire if we may have the pleasure of serving you as per quotation to you under date of the 11th inst.

Hoping to favorably hear from you, remain

Very truly yours,

M. C. Boardman, Manager
Eureka Metal Company

How did this letter come to be written? In all probability, a clerk was given a pile of correspondence a week or two old and was asked to send a follow-up to each inquirer. He ran them off rapidly, using about the same form for all and expressing the ideas in what he considered the most courteous and pleasing manner. He wanted to get a reply and if possible an order from each one. He used the language that he had seen in similar letters by other men, and never doubted that it was the best language for his purpose. Was it?

Suppose that this same clerk happens to have an errand in Kalamazoo, and is asked to go around to the

O'Connell Company's plant and try to get an order. He is ushered into the office of the purchasing agent, to whom he says: "Beg to inquire if we may have the pleasure of serving you as per quotation to you under date of the 11th inst."

But he would not use that language in talking to the purchasing agent; of course not. If he has real sales instinct, he will be respectful but not formal, friendly but not "fresh," and he will talk as one man to another about a very practical matter. The exact words will depend on circumstances, but they would be something like this: "Mr. Hansen? I am Parker from the Eureka Metal Company. We are holding those aluminum sheets for you and I just dropped in to ask how soon you are going to want them."

Now, suppose that when this clerk dictates this letter he imagines for a moment that he is in Mr. Hansen's office, and then simply *talks* his message. In that case the letter will begin like this:

Mr. R. C. Hansen
J. B. O'Connell Company
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dear Mr. Hansen:

We are holding those aluminum sheets for you and I am writing to ask how soon you are going to want them.

This will be only the beginning of the letter, in all probability, because when once he has put himself on this footing, he will find other things to say that will be of interest to Mr. Hansen and will lead to the order. But this is enough to show the great change that will come over the letter as soon as the correspondent begins to think of it as *talk*.

Why Parker Used Business Lingo. Let us again look at the letter which Parker wrote, and determine why he used formal business lingo.

We see that there are just two ideas in his letter:

1. We quoted you on the 11th.
2. Do we get the order?

Why, then, did not Parker simply say:

Gentlemen:

We quoted you on the 11th. Do we get the order?

Very truly yours,

Because he thought that would not be courteous. He wanted to make himself and his letter pleasing to the reader, and so he expanded his message from eleven words to thirty in order to get the courtesy in. How did he put the "courtesy" in?

First, he did not ask a direct question directly, but *said* he was asking it.

Second, he did not say "ask," which is the simple and natural word, but "inquire" which is more formal.

Third, he made it still more indirect by "begging to inquire."

Fourth, he did not mention the order directly, but called it a "service."

Fifth, he did not bring in the service directly, but spoke only of the pleasure the service would give his company.

Sixth, he did not say "we quoted you," but mentioned the quotation as an explanatory circumstance.

Seventh, he tacked it on with the formal phrase "as per" to give a grand, professional air.

Eighth, he did not say "on the 11th," but "under date of the 11th," again to give a professional air.

Ninth, he added "inst." (never used in talking) for the same reason.

Tenth, his ending—"hoping," etc.—gives no information; it merely smooths off the abruptness.

Eleventh, he again avoided directly asking for the order; he only hoped "to favorably hear from you."

Twelfth, he used the meaningless formality "remain."

Thirteenth, he omitted the subjects of the two principal verbs because they happened in both cases to be "we." Thus he modestly tried to conceal himself and his company, as an oriental lady veils her face when she goes out on the street.

Of course, the clerk did not think of all these points when he dictated the letter. He merely used that business lingo without any thought as to its real effect on the reader. And how do we come to have so much of this flabby business lingo in many of our business letters? Let us see.

The Origin of Business Lingo. Two or three hundred years ago every business man tried to write in a way that would suggest that he either belonged to the aristocracy or was serving the aristocracy. He hoped in this way to impress people with the high standing of his business, and thus to secure their patronage. He never addressed a member of the nobility without employing a wealth of humble and flattering expressions, protesting his own littleness and the greatness of his noble patron. And when he wrote to other customers who were not of the aristocracy, he naturally used the same style as the readiest means of flattering their vanity and getting their business.

This and the formal language of the law courts seem to be the sources of our modern "business lingo." As for the courts, it is easy to see how their pompous and artificial style arose. Law documents must be as exact as possible, and this led to the use of elaborate phrases and the retention of old expressions whose meaning had been fully established. A pompous language also helped to impress an ignorant public. Furthermore, the professional scribes who wrote out the documents in early times were paid so much a word, and they naturally preferred long sentences to short ones.

Such was the origin of much of the meaningless busi-

ness lingo still to be found in many business letters of to-day. Many lawyers of the present day freely admit that much of the current legal phraseology is worthless, and that simpler expressions would answer the purpose just as well. This is unquestionably true of many business letters.

Simplicity and naturalness of language characterize the best of modern business letters.

The Wastefulness of Business Lingo. Some people say that if a writer "begs to inquire," the reader knows that he is not really on his knees; that nobody takes the old phrases at their face value; and so, where is the harm?

The harm lies in that very fact, that the phrases are meaningless. That is the main point in the indictment of business lingo. It takes up the space and time that should be devoted to a real interchange of ideas.

Meaningless phrases have no place in a good business letter; they are wasteful of space and time.

To go back to our clerk in the Eureka Metal Company—if he had been deprived of his business lingo and been forced to dictate his letter in the talk language, he would have felt the need of *saying something* in addition to the blunt question—"Do we get the order?" His instinct to soften the bluntness was right, but his way of softening it was wrong. He smothered it in meaningless words when he should have surrounded it with more ideas and so produced a letter that deserved a reply.

In order to make plain the wastefulness of the "lingo" style of writing, let us read a little burlesque published some years ago in a business magazine. Two business men are walking down the street on a summer morning discussing the ball game of the afternoon. In the left-hand column is the actual conversation. In the other column, the conversation is translated into the language they would be likely to use if they were writing to each other on a business matter.

"Going to the game to-day, eh? Got tickets?"

"I was pleased to learn, in conversation with you yesterday, that you are contemplating attending the ball game this P.M. Beg to inquire whether you have purchased tickets for same."

"No."

"Your favor of the eighth to hand and contents noted. Beg to advise that I have not, as yet, obtained tickets, but hope to secure same immediately. Thanking you for the friendly interest manifested in your inquiry, I beg to remain."

"Jones going?"

"Beg to inquire whether Jones, of Jones, Larkin & Company, will accompany you."

"No."

"Replying to your favor of the eighth, would say that Jones, of Jones, Larkin & Company, is otherwise engaged. Trusting that this answers your inquiry satisfactorily and thanking you for your past courtesies, beg to remain."

"Believe I'll go along."

"Your esteemed communication of even date received. Beg to suggest that the undersigned accompany you to the game referred to in our communication of the eighth. Trusting that this proposition meets with your entire approval and assuring you of our willingness to serve you to the best of our ability, we are.—P. S. Address all communications in care of the undersigned and refer to file No. 77,761."

"Fine. Get your wife and I'll get mine, and we'll have supper together."

"Answering your esteemed favor of even date, would say the undersigned will be pleased to have you accompany me, as he would otherwise go by myself. Undersigned begs further to state that he will also invite my wife. Kindly advise whether your wife will accept undersigned's invitation and join me and his wife at supper afterward. Would further state that undersigned will advise my wife to advise your wife that on receipt of advice from him, she meet you and me and your esteemed wife....."

Favorite Tricks of the "Lingo" Writer. One of the pet formalities of the business lingoist is the participial ending. This consists in closing the letter with a paragraph

that begins with a participle ending in "ing," such as trusting, hoping, believing, looking forward to, assuring you, etc. Such concluding paragraphs never tell the reader anything that he did not know before. They are not intended to give information, but merely to close the letter without seeming abruptness.

In the letter quoted on page 11, the writer would have thought it rude to omit the second paragraph and stop when his question was completed. So he let the message slide off gradually, so to speak, with a meaningless flourish.

In this he made a serious mistake. The question coming at the end should have called for a reply. He has smothered its urgency with his ceremonious close. He seems to say, like the grandee in *The Mikado*—"And I am right and you are right, and everything is quite correct." The effect is soothing rather than stimulating. It is as much as says, "Pray don't imagine that I am expecting anything from you. This letter is merely a piece of formality, not a man-to-man civil question that demands a civil answer." And so it will probably get no answer.

Another favorite trick of the business lingo writer is that he seldom makes a statement or asks a question directly, but *says* he is doing it, or perhaps asks permission to say he is doing it. He does not say, "Do you need that truck now?" but he says, "We beg to inquire whether you have occasion to use a truck." He shuns a plain statement such as "We have reduced the price," and prefers "We beg to advise that our prices have been reduced."

He is terribly afraid of saying "I" or "we." Sometimes he substitutes "the writer" or "the undersigned"; sometimes he omits the subject of a verb altogether, which gives a queer breathless effect to the letter; and sometimes he puts the verb into the passive form, as, "These goods are not handled by us," in place of "We do not handle these goods."

A List of Lingo Expressions. Here is a list of the commonest expressions of the business lingoist. While it cannot be said that none of the following expressions should ever be used in a letter, they are all so full of the lingo tone that it is a good plan to avoid them as much as possible.

Above. "The above date," "the above description," "the above remark," "the above statement." Why not say "the below date," "the below description"? This use of *above* as an adjective has never been recognized by careful writers, and it is just as easy to say "the foregoing," which is at least good English. A better way still is to find a more natural form of reference to what has gone before. The simple word *this* often covers the case completely.

Advise and advice. The proper meaning of these words, as everybody knows, is *counsel*. The doctor and the lawyer give advice to their patients or clients. It is not exactly bad English to speak of mere information as advice, but it is formal—far too formal for an ordinary letter. The banks have a special form of communication known as an "advice," and as this usage is well established, the letter writer must, of course, conform to it when he is referring to that particular document. Elsewhere he will do well to avoid the expression and use "say," "tell," "notify," or "inform."

Agreeable to. "Agreeable to your instructions we are shipping the goods" is bad for two reasons: first, because the adverb *agreeably* should be used in this construction, and second, because this meaning of *agreeable* is somewhat old fashioned and formal. It is better to say "following your instructions," or to change the form of the sentence.

As per. *Per* is Latin in this sense and gives the formal tone. In its other meaning (as "ten dollars per car") it may be called English. "As per our latest tariff" is pure lingo.

At hand. "Yours of the second instant at hand." Compare the effect of this: "Your letter came this morning."

Attached hereto. It is usually better not to tell the reader things that he can see for himself, but if (for purposes of record) the attaching must be mentioned, then it is better to say "attached to this sheet." The forms *hereto*, *thereto*, *herewith*, *therewith*, *hereby*, *thereby*, *herein*, *therein*, *hereon*, *thereon*, *hereafter*, *thereafter*, *hereinbefore*, *heretofore*, *hereupon*, *thereupon*, are all somewhat antiquated and stiff. *Therefor* also belongs in this class, but *therefore* is a thoroly live word.

At this time. Why not say "now" or "just now" or "to-day" or "yet"?

Beg. "Beg to acknowledge," "beg to advise," "beg to assure you," "beg to congratulate," "beg to decline," "beg to differ," "beg to explain," "beg to express," "beg to inform," "beg to inquire," "beg to make," "beg to notify," "beg to offer," "beg to present," "beg to propose," "beg to question," "beg to quote," "beg to refer," "beg to state," "beg to stipulate," "beg to suggest," "beg to withdraw," and a hundred others. The effect of such expressions is to make the whole letter unreal; or if the suppliant attitude is genuine, then there must be something wrong with the writer's position. If his goods are really what the reader needs, or his collection or adjustment is fair and right, there is no need to beg.

Communication. In a somewhat elaborate discussion of a subject where the author is hard put to it to avoid a monotonous repetition of words, there is no harm in sometimes calling a letter a "communication"; but why do it in a letter? "Your communication of the 8th" puts the reader at a distance. "Your letter" brings him near and makes him feel more like talking.

Conforming to. Good English, but bad letter style, because it does not sound like talk. "Conforming to your request we are forwarding" is too formal for practical business.

Contents carefully noted. Why tell him that you have read his letter? Why not show him you have by your careful reply? If the idea is to be expressed, it is better to say, "I have read your letter with a great deal of interest."

Desire. The word is not to be condemned altogether, but it is rather ceremonious. "I want to tell you" is better than "I desire to inform you" for most occasions.

Esteemed. "Your esteemed communication received" is enough to take the life out of any letter.

Favor. This word when used to mean *letter* is almost as bad as *beg*, and implies the same attitude. Whether the attitude is real or not, the word is objectionable. The same criticism applies to this word when used as a verb, as in "favor us with an order." No real business man wants an order that is given as a favor.

Former and latter. Sometimes it is hard to avoid these words, but they always give a formal tone. Usually it is better to repeat the noun. "We are out of both bolts and ties. The bolts (not "the former") will be here on Wednesday."

Hereafter, herein, herewith, etc. See *Attached hereto* on page 19.

Inasmuch as. This is sometimes heard in talk, and some people have a special fondness for it, but it remains a formal and rather affected phrase. It has an air of legal precision that is out of place in ordinary letters.

Inclosed find. Imagine handing a package to a friend with the words "Inclosed find a little birthday present." The formality is evident.

Inclose herewith. See *Attached hereto*.

In conformity with. See *Conforming to*.

In re. See *Re*.

Inst., ult., prox. These abbreviations for *instant*, *ultimo*, *proximo*, are among the worst examples of busi-

ness lingo. The words are Latin and have never been adopted into English. It is just as easy to say "July 12" as to say "the 12th ult." It may be asked why it is not just as bad to say "10 A.M." or "12 M.," but the answer is evident. A.M., P.M., and M. are in general use and are convenient abbreviations. They have been thoroly naturalized. But even here a better effect is secured by saying "10 in the morning."

Latter. See *Former*.

Meet with your approval. Compare "We trust this proposition will meet with your approval" with "We hope you will like the plan."

Of even date, of recent date, of the above date. Try using these forms in conversation and their artificial character will be startlingly evident. The first is grotesque in its distorted use of the word *even*, the second is an awkward attempt to conceal the writer's ignorance of the exact date, and the third has the adjective use of *above*. They all have a stilted sound and should be dropped.

Party. The proper meaning is "one who takes part," as a party to a lawsuit, a party to an agreement. Its use as a general word for *person* is a sure sign of the artificial style.

Patron. Not always objectionable, but it is too high sounding a word for mere customers in ordinary business.

Per. The only good use is in such expressions as "five dollars per pound." Even here it is better to say "a pound." ("Five dollars *the* pound" is an obsolete usage. It is intentionally whimsical, and so there is nothing to be said against it, except that it might be better for business to be serious.) "Per our agreement" is extreme lingo.

Prox. See *Inst.*

Re or *in re*. This has the merit of brevity, and so may some day become good English. At present it is a sign of lingo writing. Try using it in talk.

Same, used as a pronoun, is allowable only in legal documents. The lawyers, who must put precision above everything else, may be permitted to say, "Referring to the contract, we have inspected same," but the business man who uses this style is putting himself on a pair of stilts, to the great detriment of business.

State. It is almost always better to use *say* or *tell*. Compare "You stated in yours of the 8th" with "You said in your last letter."

Take this opportunity. This is not as bad as some of the lingoisms, but it usually sounds stiff. Compare "I take this opportunity to congratulate you" with "I am glad to have a chance to tell you that your speech was fine."

Thanking you in advance. One of the worst of the lot. It always makes the reader uncomfortable. It amounts to saying "I'm a generous soul and I'll do my part right now, so here's your pay—now go ahead and do your work."

Thereafter, therein, thereupon, etc. See *Attached hereto*.

To hand. "Your letter came to hand" is straight lingo. "Your letter to hand" is worse, because it is not even English. It reminds one of the ex-service man who remarked complacently, "I was to war."

Ult. See *Inst*.

Valued. "Your valued order" is bad simply because the word is not so used in familiar talk.

Via. This word is sometimes defended on the ground that it is used in talk, at least by railroad men. The answer seems to be that it is not used in general talk, and so remains a technical expression, not suited to a friendly style of writing. It will probably be long before it is given up in railroad circles, because it is short, clear, and convenient, and perhaps there is no reason to object to it

there. Other business men, however, will do well to say "by way of" except in formal lists.

We remain. Try it in a telephone conversation.

Would ask, would remind, would say. Clear indications of the writer's fear of being direct and frank. In what way is "We would ask how you desire the goods shipped" better than "How shall we ship the goods?"

Terror of giving offense by speaking directly and plainly is the curse of the business correspondent. It has no basis in fact. It is a pure illusion. Nobody is offended by a frank question or statement. In fact, it is the highest compliment that can be paid to a reader.

Yours for "your letter." An example of the queer tendency of the lingoist to clip his sentences, as if to make up for the general indirectness of his style. The omission of *I* and *we*, already referred to, is another instance of the same thing. The effect is unfortunate, because it gives an air of haste and lack of consideration. *The* is also frequently omitted, with the same result.

Such are some of the more commonly used words and phrases which rob a business letter of its freshness, naturalness, and directness, tending to make it artificial and formal or unfriendly in tone. The absence of "lingoism" is an outstanding feature of really effective letters.

Long habitual use of the lingo in letters is often difficult to correct. We like to follow lines of least resistance. But once we understand the bad effects of a lingo-phrased letter, correcting this fault becomes an easier and more urgent matter. When it is corrected, we find that we have taken one of the essential steps toward gaining ability to write good letters.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LETTER?

Part III

THE THOUGHT BEHIND THE LETTER

IF IT is agreed that we should not write a letter in the old, formal way, the next question is, How shall we write it?

On this point there are many things to be said. Most of them, when they are said, appear quite obvious, and yet it is necessary to say them because they are not generally observed in practice.

The Preliminary Thinking before Writing. The first and most obvious point is that the writer should plan and arrange in his own mind what he is going to say before he says it. If the message requires any preliminary investigation, he should make that investigation before he begins dictating. He should have all the facts clear in his mind, and he should decide on some sort of arrangement of his material. Having done this and knowing what he wants to say, he should go ahead and say it in the simplest, clearest, and friendliest way that he can find. That is the whole art of letter writing in a nutshell.

First plan and arrange what is to be said; then say it in a simple, clear, and friendly way.

But how many of us do that? We are constantly thrown off the track by the idea that a letter is a formal document, something different from talk. The great weakness of formality lies in its use to cover the lack of real thinking and real knowledge. One advantage in getting rid of the formality is that it forces us to think about what we are going to say and to make sure that we have the facts straight.

Consider the following case taken from the letter files of the Norton Company, of Worcester, Mass. This company had supplied a certain concern with some grinding

wheels, and one of them was returned as defective, with the following letter:

We are returning to you by express one defective grinding wheel.

This wheel has been used but a short time in our tool department, and when it broke, was running about 800 revolutions per minute.

Will you kindly inspect it and advise whether you will either send us a new wheel or issue a credit to offset it.

The care with which this matter was handled by the Norton Company is shown by the following reply written by this company's adjuster:

The pieces of the broken wheel have been carefully examined. One break extended thru the center and divided the wheel about evenly, and one of the halves was broken into four pieces. One of the small pieces shows a gouge mark, which is on a line at right angles to the main break.

The nature of the fracture indicates a breakage due to a sudden blow on the side of the wheel. Furthermore, we find that the wheel is reduced to $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches diameter from 14 inches; also that there has been considerable side grinding, which has worn the wheel from $1\frac{1}{3}$ inches to $\frac{7}{8}$ inch thick outside of the flanges. This indicates to us that the wheel was in operation some little time before the breakage occurred.

We cannot feel in any way responsible for this breakage. Of course, we wish to be fair, and if you feel that credit should be issued, we will comply with your request, but there is no evidence to show that the breakage was due to any manufacturing defect.

The more you study this letter, the more good things you will see in it. The writer secures at once a great advantage over the customer by going into the facts of the case more deeply than he did. He shows plainly that he is fair-minded, and in the last paragraph he makes a very liberal offer; but notice how skillfully this offer is made; no right-minded man could accept it without first proving that his claim was just. Accordingly, the customer replied as follows:

Referring to your letter regarding the broken emery wheel about which we wrote you, we are willing to admit that this wheel was given a steady usage, and was also used for side grinding. We are certain, however, that this wheel was only in operation about ten days, and was not running over 800 revolutions per minute. We will leave the matter of adjustment, if any, to you, and will await your reply with interest.

This is a clever letter. The customer tries to secure for himself the same advantage that the adjuster had in his letter—and makes an offer, but one that cannot be accepted without further proof. The adjuster, however, was too much for him, as his next letter shows:

Almost immediately before shipment, the wheel in question was tested at 2,475 r.p.m., which certainly proves that it was free from defects. This speed test subjects a wheel to a velocity-developed strain from three to four times as great as that which it ordinarily meets in practice.

The fact that this wheel was in operation about ten days before going to pieces indicates to us that it must have met with an accident. If it was injured during transit or handling, it naturally would have broken almost immediately after being placed in operation.

While we cannot feel that we are in any way responsible, we are perfectly willing to share the loss with you. If a credit on this basis will satisfactorily dispose of the matter, we would thank you to write us again, and we shall be pleased to issue a credit memorandum covering 50 per cent of the invoice value of the wheel.

The purchaser's final letter was a complete surrender:

We have your letter and wish to advise that we have withdrawn our claim for the breakage of the wheel mentioned. Under the circumstances, as outlined in past correspondence, we are convinced that this breakage is solely up to us.

We wish to thank you for the fairness with which you have handled this matter.

Correspondence of this kind is a fascinating game. Each writer tries to prove himself more liberal, fair-minded, and intelligent than his adversary. At the same time the contest is friendly, and the result sought on both sides is a just and friendly settlement. But the main point here is that the Norton Company's adjustment letters were based on thoro investigation and careful thinking. They are quite different from the routine, generalized letters that make up the bulk of business mail.

We shall consider later the kind of training that enables letter writers to produce letters like those written by the Norton Company's adjustment correspondent; but for the present, let us analyze the attitude of the man who writes such letters.

The Attitude of the Writer of Good Letters. One thing that strikes us at once is that this kind of letter writing requires time. Now no one will give time to a thing unless he feels that it is important, so it is evidently necessary first of all to get a true sense of the importance of letters, and then to arrange one's work in such a way that each letter can be well handled, however much time it may require.

There is a strong temptation to regard a pile of incoming mail as a thing that must be run off as quickly as possible and got out of the way so that other things can be done. This idea must be completely driven from the mind before good letters can be written.

The correspondent should train himself to think of every letter as an opportunity—a chance to do a really fine piece of work that will build up business and good will.

The wise correspondent puts his morning mail ahead of everything else and begins his day with the thought that his first and greatest task is to make the most of every letter that has come to his desk. He drives from his mind every other consideration and takes up each letter in turn with the thought of using to the utmost every opportunity that it presents for intelligent, creative work. In short, he ceases to think of his letter writing as a task and trains himself to treat it always as a great opportunity.

In other words, he is like an artist. His ambition is to make his letters the best in the business. It is wonderful what a change will come over one's letters when this thought is taken as the starting point.

Planning the Message of the Letter. Planning the thought to be put into the letter leads naturally to the matter of arranging the contents of the letter, on which a great deal has been said and written. One wonders in reading some of the many elaborate schemes for letter building, and in studying the impressive charts, whether

the authors of these schemes and charts really make their own letters in such a scientific fashion. It is one thing to think about the purpose of a letter until the real message stands out clear and distinct, and quite another thing to construct the letter logically, part by part, according to fixed rules.

To think out clearly the real purpose and message of a letter before starting dictation is common-sense procedure.

Then let the contents of the letter be arranged so that the message will most effectively accomplish its purpose. The arrangement of the message is subordinate to the purpose. The purpose of the letter, or the effect that it is to achieve, is the important thing to carry clearly in mind while planning the contents of the message; also while dictating the message. Everything said by the successful letter writer is aimed to help him accomplish the well-defined purpose of his letter; and he is always conscious of the fact that his reader is naturally not inclined to pay close attention to the letters he reads. He must win and hold attention. His letter must be interesting to the reader.

Good Letters Are Like Sharp Arrows. Genuine, vital letters—planned with a clearly defined purpose or effect in mind, and written in natural and simple language without any artificially formal expressions or lingoisms in them—are like sharp arrows driven straight to the mark. They penetrate into the consciousness of the reader thru the hard shell of indifference that surrounds it.

A really successful letter writer is able to win and hold the full attention of the reader from beginning to end.

To get the full attention of a reader is no easy matter, and holding it for any length of time is harder still. The reader's mind is occupied with its own thoughts, and resists the intrusion of ideas from outside. In writing

letters, it is easier for us just to let one idea suggest another, and to ramble along in an endless path of self-centered reflection, than it is to adjust ourselves to the ideas of somebody else. We must plan our message and write it with full realization of the fact that our reader's mind is surrounded by a hard shell of indifference.

The Beginning of the Letter. Thus when you send a man a letter, you are making an effort to penetrate into his consciousness. Like the true flight of an arrow, you want what you say to go deep into the reader's mind. Particularly the beginning of your letter, the first line or two, should be planned with this in mind. If the head of your arrow is blunt, it will not penetrate a sofa pillow, to say nothing of a bony skull. If, for example, you say, "Replying to your esteemed favor of the 18th inst., we beg to advise," that beginning may have some claim to the reader's attention, but it is a poor claim. It is a blunt and clumsy arrowhead.

Compare that beginning with one like this: "You will be glad to know that I have found just the man you want." In this case, the writer tells the reader something of real interest to him in the first line of the letter. This writer with a little preliminary thinking has sharpened his arrow. He has picked out the essential message and put that first in his letter. Moreover, he has expressed it from the reader's point of view with a direct appeal to his feelings. Such an opening represents the greatest attention-getting power that it is possible to give to a letter.

The first line of a letter should say the thing that is of essential interest to the reader.

Much study has been put into this matter of letter openings, and the result has been the establishing of two "schools." One, which may be called the "two-center" school, argues that the first thing necessary is to find a center of attention that is easily stimulated and aim at that; then when the attention is drawn to this point, to

lead it to another center, which is the point of your message.

Here is an example of this kind of opening:

Dear Sir:

Perhaps you've heard the story of the young fellow who offered to bet the late "Tom" Lowry a hundred thousand dollars against some eight or ten thousand that he (Mr. Lowry) would die within a year.

Lowry took the bet, and the youth handed him an application for an insurance policy with the request to "Sign here." Lowry signed, and the young man had accomplished a feat that insurance men for years had declared impossible.

I tried this story on a prospective client of my own the other day, and he was quite annoyed with me. "Young man," he said, "I want you to understand that I don't gamble!" My reply—and I'll admit that it was brash, altho it landed the bacon—was: "But, sir, every day you do without insurance you ARE gambling now; you are betting the assured comfort and security of your family against the amount of the premium!" My prospect growled a little before he bit, but he did, because he saw the point. I wonder if it will appeal to YOU?

Thus in this "two-center" opening, the writer first centers the reader's attention on a story that readily stimulates his attention; then leads from that into his real message. This "two-center" plan has been used in many sales letters, but its popularity seems to be waning. The reason is obvious—it is too elaborate for our busy age. We are all flooded with advertising appeals. When we open a letter, we are usually anxious to find an excuse for throwing it aside. If the opening is indirect, we see that fact at once, and we usually do not have the patience to follow the writer thru his ingenious but irritating introduction. In nearly all cases, it is much better to—

Put a vital part of your message, a part of direct interest to the reader, in the first words of your letter—and put it from the reader's point of view.

Not all successful letters follow this rule, but enough of them do to make it a safe one to adopt.

Some writers follow the idea of always beginning a letter with the word "You." If not pushed too hard, this idea is a good one. One successful writer always

starts his letters by putting down the word "You" and then completing the sentence as best he can. Here are some of his beginnings:

"You can protect your direct advertising from post box to prospect at less than one-eighth of a cent apiece."

"You can make 56 per cent profit on Diamond toilet preparations without risking one cent."

It is apparent that such openings tend to cause the reader to be willing to read on in the hope of finding out how he may secure the profit or gain mentioned—in accordance with a sound principle of salesmanship previously explained in Executive Manual 20.

The Body of the Letter. If the opening of a letter must win attention and cause the reader to want to read on, the body of the letter must not disappoint him. It must hold his attention to the end. This means, among other things, that—

The body of a letter should be so worded that it can be read without effort; its message should be so arranged and connected that the reader will understand at a glance.

Some letter writers think that if they set down all the facts they can collect in relation to the case in hand, they have made a good letter. But letters made in this way are usually difficult to read and understand. The reader must often go over the whole thing two or three times, picking out the details that are of real interest, and arranging them in a natural order in his mind. The result is that he, in many cases, will lay the letter aside until he has plenty of time for it—and when he finally picks out the meaning, his interest is exhausted, and he takes only such action as is absolutely necessary. How much more favorable would be his attitude toward the letter if he could read it all easily and with pleasure! This would put him in the mood to act promptly and energetically, and the result for the writer would be the complete success of his letter.

It is true that many letters deal with matters in which mistakes must be carefully avoided. But this is no reason why the reader should be encumbered with a great mass of facts, only a few of which are of real interest to him. It will pay any letter writer to study his past letters with this point in mind. He will probably be surprised to find how many details might have been omitted altogether, and how much more interesting his letters might have been had he arranged the contents with a view toward winning and holding the reader's interest.

What to Omit from Letters. Some letter writers labor under the mistaken idea that they must write out all the details of a case in order to make a complete record for their files—and then send the whole thing off to burden the reader!

Some means of identification may be needed to make the reader understand what you are talking about, but they should be as brief and simple as possible, and they should almost never stand at the beginning of a paragraph. Consider the effect of such a sentence as this:

With reference to your favor of July 30th re note of John Stillwell, included in your cash letter of June 18th, which you say was wrongly reported, the same having been included in your cash letter of June 17th, we beg to advise that this correction has already been made, etc.

Evidently in a case like this the writer has two objects in mind. One is to make it easy to file the copy of the letter and to find it again if necessary. The other is to make the reader understand what he is talking about. The trouble with this method is that the identification marks are made the prominent things. The reader has to dig out the real message from a pile of rubbish, and the best part of his attention is used up before he comes to the real heart of the letter. How much better to put the thing like this:

We find that correction has already been made on the Stillwell note, mentioned in your letter of July 30. We have handled it as of June 17.

It is wonderful how much can be done to clear up the body of the letter by using a little ingenuity; and it relieves the burden of the writer, as well as that of the reader. With a little practice almost anything can be handled in a few simple sentences; and so handled, matters that seemed tangled and obscure become as clear as spring sunshine.

Taking the Reader's Viewpoint. Several times in this first manual on business correspondence we have seen that a successful letter writer takes the reader's point of view. As this is fundamental, we had better consider it more fully at this point. There is probably no principle of letter writing that has been so much discussed—and so much misunderstood, for there is a wrong way and there is a right way to take the reader's point of view. The wrong way is offensive; the right way gives pleasure to the reader and makes the letter a success.

Correspondence is an exchange of ideas in which two people take part. It is a great mistake for the letter writer to try to play both parts. Some letter writers think that this is the way to take the reader's point of view. They say, "We know you are anxious to look your best in the office. You are probably needing a new pair of shoes. Come around and see the beautiful styles that we are now displaying." The reader is not attracted, because the letter writer is playing the reader's part as well as his own. It would be much more interesting to the reader if the writer would say, "How about footwear? Do you think it is worth while for a business man to consider the appearance of his shoes?"

Another wrong way to take the reader's point of view is to repeat in detail what the reader has already said in a previous letter. The first letter on page 32 is a good example of this. The chances are that the reader is no longer interested in what he said; he wants to know whether the Stillwell note was handled correctly or not.

So the revised paragraph begins by answering his questions, and makes the reference to his letter as short and inconspicuous as possible.

Thus there are two important "don'ts" in applying the "you" attitude (taking the reader's point of view) to the writing of letters:

1. Don't try to do all the reader's thinking for him.
2. Don't waste time by repeating details that he already knows.

A company that makes an acetylene welder (we will call it the Proto-Welder) wanted to interest repair men in the new and improved machine. The company did not talk about its own splendid factory and successful business, and it did not fill the letter with commonplaces about the reader's needs, but it put before him a striking picture of the large profits that he could make by using the new welder. Here is the way in which the letter began:

Dear Sir:

Suppose you presented your customer with a repair bill for \$27.85.

Then suppose you looked in your own books and noted that you had arrived at this bill as follows:

To labor and materials, plus profit.....	\$ 7.85
To one-half money saved customer.....	20.00
Total	\$27.85

The customer wouldn't argue about the price—he'd be glad to pay. The chances are the same repair by any other method would have cost much more than the \$27.85. There would be no question as to YOUR profit in such a transaction.

No sensible repair man would refuse to read a letter like that. His own business is being discussed, and he is being given a brand-new idea. Having secured his attention in a natural and logical way, the writer proceeds to explain more fully how the gratifying results described in the first paragraph can be brought about. The letter goes on:

This is an actual illustration of the profits which others are making—and which YOU could make—by doing welding work with a Proto-Welder.

Quick repairs of broken metal parts are in demand. The cost of a new part is only half of the story with the customer—the time saved is important, and often figures heavily in the saving of money.

Let it be known that YOU can do quick, successful welding—as you surely can with a Proto-Welder—and you won't have much trouble in building up a good welding business at good, profit-paying prices.

If mechanics can go into this line and profitably give their ENTIRE TIME to it, doesn't it look good enough as a side line for you?

The capital required is very small. Your first few weeks of profit should more than pay for your whole equipment.

Right now is the proper time to start in the job-welding business. Every day you delay means that much lost profit. The opportunity actually exists.

Why not grasp it to-day?

We inclose stamped envelope for your reply.

Yours very truly,

How to End a Letter. Notice that the writer of that letter does not end his letter weakly by "Hoping" or "Trusting to hear from you soon," but that he says, "We inclose a stamped envelope for your reply"—suggesting strongly that he expects to receive a reply. What do the old-fashioned, meaningless endings suggest to the reader?

Here are some typical specimens:

Trusting that this answers your inquiry satisfactorily, and hoping to hear from you further in the near future, we beg to remain

Soliciting your further valued favors, we beg to sign ourselves

Thanking you for your inquiry and hoping to receive your order, we are

Assuring you that your command will have our prompt and careful attention, we remain

If the chief object of a business letter were to leave a pleasant taste in the mouth of the reader, such endings might be justifiable, but this is not the case. The object of the letter is to get action of some sort, or at least to

leave a definite idea in the mind of the reader. Now the end of the letter is second only to the beginning in prominence, and therefore in importance. It is not the first thing read, but it is the last thing read, and it offers a fine opportunity for summing up what has been said and calling for action or for further consideration.

A letter should end with something that will produce action immediately or leave a very definite impression on the reader's mind, and cause him to think about the letter after he has laid it down.

In old-fashioned endings, such as those just quoted, the thought is commonplace and uninteresting, and the form is weak. Participles ending in "ing," such as trusting, soliciting, thanking, assuring, and so on, are always weak, especially so in comparison with direct and positive statements or requests at the end of the letter. For example, compare the foregoing participial endings with the following:

Just mail the signed, stamped, addressed post card, and we will gladly arrange a demonstration for you without your incurring any obligation.

We shall have to hurry to get the work done in time to catch the month's mailing; better phone me (713 on either phone) to go ahead without delay.

Be sure to come, for this will be one of those nights you read about.

Before it is possible to answer your letter completely, it will be necessary for us to make a thoro investigation. This will be done immediately, so that we expect to be able to write you fully by next Thursday.

We feel that if he fully understands the situation, our action will be satisfactory to him.

Will you kindly inspect it and tell us whether you will either send us a new wheel or issue a credit to offset it?

Three Good Selling Letters. In this first executive manual at the start of our training in the art of writing better letters, we have broadly surveyed the answer to the question, What Makes a Good Letter? Many details remain to be taken up later, but the essential principles

of successful letter writing are really simple, as we have seen.

In conclusion, let us note the application of these principles in three remarkably interesting and successful letters which were sent out by Hart, Schaffner & Marx. They were sent to a select list of dealers who had never replied to any previous letters from this great clothing house. All previous attempts had failed, but the three letters which follow are said to have made 20 per cent of their readers regular customers of the house. Read them carefully and notice how different they are from the old, formal style of letter writing. Notice particularly in each case the interesting beginning; the clear, readable development; and the strong ending.

Gentlemen:

You know how it is in business, there are a lot of people whom you'd like to sell goods to who don't trade with you. Quite likely you can name a dozen men, right in, just your kind of fellows, who don't come to you. You wish they would; you believe, honestly, that it would pay them to do so; and you'd like to know why they don't.

That's the way we feel about the good clothing men who don't buy our goods. We don't expect to sell everybody in the business; it wouldn't be a good thing if we did.

But your concern, somehow, seems to be our kind; we feel that, with a town like yours, and a trade like yours, and a business sense like yours, we ought to be working together to build up a fine trade for both of us.

Now, you know us; you know our goods. There's probably some reason why you're not buying them, and you know what it is. We wish you'd tell us what it is; very candidly. If we're "in wrong," we ought to be told, and if there's something here that's a good thing for you, then you ought to know about it.

Let's write a few letters to each other, and see if we haven't some common ground of advantage.

Yours truly,

Gentlemen:

You had a letter from us the other day; it wasn't a "circular letter" either; it was "personal"; so is this one.

In that letter, which used up quite a good many words, we really asked just one simple question—Why don't you handle our goods?

We put it much more delicately than that, but that's really what it amounts to.

Now we can't decently insist on your answering that question; but we'd like very much to have your answer to it. You may have so good a reason for not selling Hart, Schaffner & Marx clothing that when we know what it is, we'll say, "You're right," and that will be the end of it.

But we're not going to be quite satisfied until you tell us. For fear you haven't our stamped return envelope handy, we inclose another. Tell us very plainly.

Yours truly,

Gentlemen:

The fact is, we really want to know, and you haven't told us yet—Why don't you handle Hart, Schaffner & Marx clothing? Is there a good reason? Maybe you don't like the clothing; maybe you don't like us.

You needn't feel that you are committing yourselves to anything by answering our question; but we don't feel that we're being fair to ourselves unless we know why so good a concern as yours and so good a concern as ours, are not on closer terms.

We don't want to bother you with calls; letters are really more convenient for both of us. But letters don't get anybody anywhere unless the other fellow answers them. Drop us a line and tell us.

Yours truly,

In the next executive manual we shall get at more of the principles which apply in writing sales letters—remembering that nearly all of what is said there will apply in writing other kinds of letters. Executive Problem 79, which follows, gives an interesting opportunity to find out what makes a good letter, in the one best way—by making it ourselves.

CHECK-UP ON PRINCIPLES

Use the following check-up to get the principles of this manual firmly fixed in mind. This will help you to handle the problem which follows. This check-up is entirely for your own personal use, so you need not send it in to the University.

	Check	
	Yes	No
When Abraham Lincoln wanted to notify General Hooker that he had put him at the head of the Army, and also to give him some personal advice, he began his letter, "I have placed you at the head of the Army of the Potomac." Was this a good opening sentence?		
You occasionally get a circular sales letter. Do you usually read it thru?		
Do you like this passage from a collection letter? "Now I had never seen you, never heard your voice, never written you a line. And yet when that order of yours came to me, I looked up some books, judged you by some letters and figures, and put my O.K. on your order. I paid you the highest compliment I could pay to any man—I <i>trusted you</i> ."		
A post card sent out by a moving-picture theater to 14,000 people began: "We're going to show a picture at your theater that I'd like to have you see." Would this get attention?		
William James, the psychologist, says: "Sensitive-ness to immediately exciting sensorial stimuli characterizes the attention of childhood and youth. In mature age we have generally selected those stimuli which are connected with one or more so-called permanent interests, and our attention has grown irresponsive to the rest." Does this help to explain why so many letters fail to get attention?		
Can you find at least six distinct faults in the following opening paragraph? "Referring to your report to our Chicago office of the loss of an umbrella in car 337, en route Boston to Chicago, October 22-23, beg to advise that investigation with porter of this car fails to develop any trace of the missing article."		
Do you think it a good plan to end a sales letter by asking the reader to fill out and send in a card or slip?		

	Check	
	Yes	No
Each trade and profession develops a number of expressions which are either confined to that field or are used there in a peculiar way. These expressions are known as the "technical language" of that occupation, and are useful and necessary there. Is the "business lingo" a "technical language"?		
Collection letters are often filled with the grief and surprise of the creditor that the bill has not been paid. Is this good practice?		
The "two-center" theory is often criticized on the ground that it is easier to get attention to one idea than to two. Do you think this objection is sound?		
It is sometimes said that if all business people would work together to make business as simple as possible, office hours would be reduced one-half. Do you agree?		
Have you reviewed some of your own letters to see how far you have been following the principles outlined in this manual?		
Shakespeare makes Hamlet say: "Oh, there be players—that, neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably." Do you think this description applies to some letter writers?		

Executive Problem 79

MAKING A GOOD LETTER

Composing a Letter That Will Win a Cordial Reading

UNDER THE LASALLE PROBLEM METHOD



THE humanest words are those which are used daily in the home, on the street, in the field, in the shop. The words used by scholars are less human, colder, less interesting. Of course, scientific words are all the time passing into popular usage, and to a mother whose child has been saved from diphtheria the word "antitoxin" is just as human and interesting as the word "love." But it is certain that, to the public, "fire" is more interesting than "conflagration," "brave" than "valorous," "building" than "edifice," "house" than "residence," "queer" than "eccentric," "thin" than "emaciated," "fat" than "corpulent," "truthful" than "veracious," "try" than "endeavor," "sharp" than "acute," "lying" than "mendacious," "play" than "drama."—*Edwin H. Lewis.*



Prepared by the Research and Consultation Staff of LaSalle Extension University from an interesting problem which it has carefully investigated and analyzed.

Executive Problem 79

MAKING A GOOD LETTER

The Diamond Coffee Company has made a great merchandizing success by building its business on the idea that the public will buy unadvertised food products if special inducements are offered.

The Diamond Coffee Company offers both convenience and profit. It delivers the goods to the house of the consumer at regular intervals, and it offers premiums *in advance*. For example, if a housewife orders a supply of coffee and expresses her intention of continuing to buy, she is allowed to select a valuable premium at once. Succeeding orders are credited to her until the first premium is covered, and then she selects a second. The premiums are cooking utensils, dishes, silverware, percolators, rugs, and other furnishings.

Such a business requires a large force of representatives spread over the country, and it is in the organizing and managing of this force that the Diamond officials have shown their great ability. There are eighty-nine "branches" or agencies. Each branch has a branch manager, with a number of "head salesmen." Each head salesman controls five "advance salesmen." The advance salesmen visit the homes in their territory and introduce Diamond service. The branch has also a force of "route salesmen," who call on all customers every two weeks, take orders, deliver goods and premiums, and collect the money. All these men are under the direct control of the branch manager, who makes detailed reports, including every item of receipts, expenditures, and deliveries, to the central office in Chicago. These reports are minutely examined in the central office, which is thus able to keep in touch with every detail.

Our problem concerns one of the route salesmen named Horace Stuart. The route salesmen, it should be explained, are made responsible for all the goods they handle. They report to the branch manager every two weeks what goods they will need, and the goods are ordered from the nearest Diamond warehouse. When they reach the local freight depot, the route salesman goes into the depot, inspects the goods, receipts for them, and takes them to a local warehouse, where they remain until he is ready to deliver them.

On one occasion, Mr. Stuart made a mistake. One case of percolators was short, but he failed to notice this, signed the freight receipt, and deposited his goods in the warehouse.

It happened that he left the company a few days later, before discovering his mistake. His successor, of course, found the shortage and reported it to the branch manager, who in turn reported it to the central office with the statement that he had been unable to get in touch with Stuart, his present address being unknown.

The central office was at that time behind in its work and did not reach this report for several weeks. When it did, it tried to find Stuart, and failing in this it wrote to the man who had acted as Stuart's bondsman, Mr. James Carter, of New York, and reported the shortage. Carter, who knew Stuart's whereabouts, wrote to him, and the result was the following letter from Mr. Stuart to the Diamond Coffee Company:

247 Barker Avenue
Troy, N. Y., September 22, 1925

Mr. Fred Hoteling, Auditor
Diamond Coffee Company
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Sir:

I have just had a letter from James Carter, who acted as my bondsman when I was working for your company, and he says that you are claiming \$16.24 shortage on my account with you. It is now three months since I left your employ, and I cannot understand why this matter has not been brought up before. I turned in a detailed report when I resigned my position, and nothing has ever been said to me about any shortage.

Furthermore, it is impossible that any shortage could occur under the arrangements on which I did the work. A head salesman, Mr. Goldstein, was with me constantly on all my trips and checked over the goods and money handled. If there had been anything wrong which escaped my attention, Goldstein would have caught it.

I must say, gentlemen, that this thing looks very bad for your methods. Three months after an employe leaves you, you write to his bondsman and make a claim that by all the ethics of business should first be presented to the former employe himself. To say nothing of the evident looseness of your accounting methods, you are grossly inconsiderate of the interests of a former employe, against whom no complaint was made while he was in your employ. I have written Mr. Carter that the claim is absurd, and I

rely on you to investigate the matter, find out where your error is, and write promptly to Mr. Carter exonerating me. You have put me in a very awkward position without any justification, and the least you can do is to clear the thing up at once.

Respectfully yours,
Horace Stuart (Signed)

A reply is to be written to this letter which will show that the company is right and Mr. Stuart wrong. One additional fact should be explained before you begin—Mr. Goldstein was *not* with Mr. Stuart on all his trips. He had been away from his territory for five days attending a head salesmen's convention, and Mr. Stuart's mistake occurred while he was absent. Even if Mr. Goldstein had been with him, that would have made no difference in Mr. Stuart's responsibility. It was his duty to check up on the goods sent him and to see that everything ordered was received and accounted for.

Imagine yourself now the auditor of the Diamond Coffee Company and plan a letter to accomplish the following things:

1. The slowness of the company in bringing up this matter must be explained. Three months is certainly too long a time for a thing of this kind to wait. The delay was due to three things: the inability of the branch manager to get in touch with Stuart; the fact that the home office was overburdened with work when the report came in; and the unavailing efforts of the home office to find Stuart's address. These things do not fully excuse the delay, but they make it fairly reasonable. You may use as many of them as you think wise.

2. One very natural question may occur to Stuart—why did they not write at once to Mr. Carter and get his (Stuart's) address? The plain fact seems to be that nobody thought of it. If anyone did, he probably argued that Mr. Carter was not likely to know more about it than they did; but at any rate the plan should have been tried. There is no need to bring up the question in this letter, but the writer should have it in mind. The letter should be so worded that if the point is brought up later, a frank admission may be made that the possibility was overlooked.

3. But the most important thing of all is to convince Mr. Stuart that the company has only the best intentions in the matter and wishes to be entirely fair. Mr. Stuart, altho he writes in a gentlemanly way, is evidently deeply offended. No routine apology will put him in the mood to pay the shortage. The letter should be written in a manly, straightforward style that will win him back to a friendly attitude toward the company.

This cannot be done by a curt statement of facts. On the other hand, it cannot be done by a rambling series of vague protestations. It is plain from Mr. Stuart's letter that he is a thoroly well-

meaning and capable man. He hits straight from the shoulder and has a clear eye for facts. No letter will win his respect that does not show the same qualities.

In any case, do not allow yourself to feel that this shortage is a small matter. The success of a business like this depends on the efficient handling of every detail. And anyhow the case brings up the whole question of the company's attitude toward the men with whom and thru whom it deals, and that question lies at the very heart of its business and of all business.

Identify yourself with the Diamond Coffee Company. Your company—and you—have been accused of incapacity and unfairness. It is up to you to defend the company and yourself. Show Mr. Stuart that you have a just case against him and make him willing to live up to his obligation.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

SELLING BY LETTER— Being Executive Manual 80, on Business Correspondence, in a Complete Plan of Training and Service for Executive Work

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SELLING BY LETTER

Part I

LETTERS TO SALESMEN

THE letters produced in the sales department of a business may be divided into three classes:

- (a) Letters to salesmen.
- (b) Replies to inquiries brought in by advertising.
- (c) Sales letters to lists (direct-mail selling).

In class (a) and class (c) we usually find the best letters sent out by the house; in class (b), the worst.

How Sales Managers Write to Their Men. We find in almost any business that the sales manager is writing some of the best letters produced in his house to his salesmen on the road. The reason for this is plain. Sales managers are likely to be energetic men, and the conditions under which their letters are written are more like those of personal conversation than is usually the case with other kinds of letters. The sales manager knows his men personally. He writes to them in a very intimate and familiar way about things that are of mutual interest. The object of the letter is clear; there is no need for "beating about the bush." In short, the conditions are ideal for writing good letters, and it is not surprising that a sales manager's letters to his men are usually vigorous, direct, and interesting.

If you examine a large number of letters by successful sales managers, you will be impressed with their positive and compelling strength. They do not discuss doubts and difficulties, or, if they do, it is only to show that the doubts and difficulties are largely the product of the salesman's imagination. They are meant to stimulate action. They are not intended to give definite instructions so much as to arouse the salesman's confidence and effort. They create an atmosphere in which the salesman cannot remain idle, but is impelled to exert himself to the utmost.

Successful selling letters create an atmosphere that impels action by their strong and positive expression of thought.

The best letters by sales managers fairly sparkle with energy. They are written in short, striking sentences and in familiar, often slang, language. They indulge in humor occasionally, but the jokes are not put in for their own sake, but because they help to drive home the message. Stories are often inserted, but the stories are also put in to emphasize a strong point.

Here is a successful letter that used the story method. It aims primarily to establish more strongly the right attitude on the part of the salesman in his work.

Dear Matty:

On a cold day Mr. Judge and I stopped at the Ferry Building to say hello to Ed Swasey, who grew to be a big success as a salesman and manager of salesmen. He replied to our query as to what he thought of the weather. "I haven't time to take notice of things I cannot change. All weather is alike to me. It's business I'm after."

And it's true. Weather conditions are worth only so much notice by the salesman as he can advantage himself by them. He should see only the good side—the productive side. If he can't see that, he should forget it—snow, rain, or shine. He can't change it, so why not put every ounce into cheerfully profiting by the time and the place where he is?

When someone talks "psychological depression" or "actual," remember that one hundred million people are living every day, and it costs more to live to-day than yesterday, and more is demanded to-day than yesterday in the way of luxuries and extras.

Are you a positive selling force? Each customer reads the answer in the other man's eye. If a salesman knows, he can't lose. If he doesn't, well, he's not a "positive" selling force, and the buyer knows it when he looks him in the eye, so the buyer sells him the idea that he doesn't want anything.

A salesman must be urged forward by a desire to lead, and a leader is judged by the business established, orders secured and paid for by the trade sold.

We're going to continue to grow. We want bigger men to fill higher places. Fill up your mind with good sound "stufh," keep your veins filled with good clean blood and energy. Don't neglect anything that spells success in your present work and you'll get yours. Our future will build a place for you. And if you are a "positive force," you will help the future build the place you want.

Cordially yours,

The writing of such letters as this is largely a matter of temperament, but the man who has reached the position of sales manager is in all probability a man of positive type, who does not need to be warned against the weakening effect of the old-fashioned lingo in letters. He talks straight out in a natural and friendly way. This way of writing is effective in all letters, as explained in the previous executive manual.

Straight-Out Talk to a New Salesman. The sales manager knows that a salesman will accept frank criticism of his work if it is fairly backed up by the facts in the case. He knows that a new salesman on the job has to work hard to gain a foothold in his territory. He knows that he must consider all the facts in the case—those that are favorable and those that are unfavorable in their reflection on the salesman's work. In other words, he has to be absolutely fair-minded—and he is fair-minded by temperament, else he could not be a successful sales manager, as previously explained in Executive Manual 17.

In all letters of every kind, evidence of fair-mindedness on the part of the writer helps greatly in making the letter effective in accomplishing its purpose.

Note in the following letter to a new salesman whose record has been a poor one, how the writer, a successful sales manager, talks straight out in a fair-minded way, and backs up his criticism with facts.

Dear Mr. Cartwright:

I have just taken hold of my correspondence personally again after my return from vacation, altho, as you know, my staff has taken care of all of your affairs as they have developed right along during my absence.

While I am not alarmed at the fact that you have accomplished so little to date, yet it is only being frank to say I am somewhat concerned. The thing that is plain is that you have got to put into your program two things—a different quantity and a different quality of work. It was just as well for me to let you go as long as you have gone without too much criticism, however, since it pays to let a man find out for himself by actual experience some of the things that are important regarding his work that most men can't or won't find out any other way.

The fact of the matter is that when you came into this work, you underestimated the equipment needed for the job. Most men do. They think that all they have to do is to get an outfit and send out word that they are in town and are to be found at some office number, and that the task is practically done. I knew when you were sending in your sales-training lessons at the rate of two or three or four a day that you little realized what you were going to be up against and what a really successful salesman of our line in a metropolis like Kansas City had to be.

Your reports for themselves explain with all necessary detail your lack of results to date. Let me tell you what I find in them. In the reports covering the period from June 30 to July 13, day by day as these reports came in, there were four calls on June 30; none on July 1; five on July 3; four on the 5th; four on the 6th; five on the 7th; five on the 8th; NONE each on the 10th, 11th, and 12th; and three on the 13th.

This makes a total of thirty calls in eleven working days, which is an average of a little better than two calls a day. You put thirty-four and a half minutes per man into the interviews. It is needless to say that thirty calls in eleven days is inadequate. It shows a lack of that very simple and ordinary but very necessary thing—WORK; and I don't know of any business in this world in which a man can succeed without that.

The time spent on those calls is also insufficient, and you certainly know by this time that you don't get any contact with a man's real mental equipment on things that he isn't "thinking" about every day without the process of chiseling thru the hard crust surrounding his gray matter, and then massaging that gray matter until you have got it "working" again so that the impressions you give out will begin to "take," and thus give you a real opportunity to get favorable action on our proposition.

But one of the most peculiar things about your record of calls—that is, if you really expect to get business from them—is that, with very few exceptions, you have not called upon the classes in which you could really expect to find logical prospects. I doubt if some of these men would even know what you were talking about—that is, if you were using the standard materials we have passed over to you for your mastery. I have no criticism to make of any man who wants to do any honest work in this wide world no matter what that work may be. I do not criticize the men who carry the heavy physical burdens; someone has to do that work, and I have the best feelings for them. But we are talking about logical prospects for our service, and while there are some of those whom you called upon that should be so classed, and they are ALL RIGHT, when properly sandwiched into daily programs with a large proportion of men of executive caliber, yet taken as a whole and by themselves they represent a very inadequate part of the prospects you have interviewed.

Now the fact of the matter is that there is a very large number of logical prospects for us in Kansas City who will be reached by working the city systematically on the proper basis. We want our message carried to the business men no matter how big they are—the bigger, the better. We want it carried to the executives, the near executives—the men who have brains to understand the economic problems of the day.

It takes real thought, it takes real study, and it takes real work to develop the man who will make the Kansas City territory the productive field it ought to be, and make the income for himself that success in that class will insure. The man who is ultimately going to handle that territory will have a permanent business that will render him an income of \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year and upward. I hope you are going to be that man, Mr. Cartwright. You will have your chance, and tho I have touched on that particular subject very briefly, I hope and I am sure you will be able to find in this letter the character of the qualifications that man must have, and the kind of preparation and campaign that will be required.

Let your reports hereafter show that you are appreciative of the standards that apply.

The Force of Concrete Illustrations. We are all interested in the experiences of other people. In shaping the attitude and practice of salesmen, it is always better to cite a concrete instance of the thing you want a salesman to do or not to do than merely to tell him to do it or not to do it in a preachy way. This is well illustrated in the following letter that was used by a sales manager to "pep up" those men on his sales force who were depressed or discouraged:

Once we had a man in our employ who was bright, a fine-appearing fellow and a first-class correspondent. He had all the requirements of a successful man except one. He had what I call a "negative" disposition. No matter what proposition came up, no matter what plan I laid before him, his first instinct was negative. It couldn't be done, it wasn't practical, or it wouldn't produce results. I talked with him time and again about his overcoming his "negative" tendencies, but couldn't make any impression on him. We tried him in several different positions, but his "negative" disposition defeated him at every angle and we let him go.

I met him about a year later, and he said he now realized what I meant by my talk about his "negative" disposition, and he was now fighting this tendency to the limit and thought he had it whipped. We offered him a new position in charge of our battery department and outlined our aims. He wanted the job, but said he didn't think we could break into Detroit with our battery because of the stiff competition. You see, "Old Man Negative" had a strangle hold on him, and he is still looking for the right kind of a job.

I got to thinking about this case the other night and wondered if "Old Man Negative" had been getting a grip on any of our boys during these past few months. Business has been dull, no doubt about it, but some of our men have gone right along selling goods just the same and some have not. I firmly believe that the salesman who possessed a "positive" disposition walked into the dealer's store with the thought firmly in his mind that he was not only going to get an order, but a good-sized one that

would not leave a single item for the man coming behind him. The man with the "negative" slant, however, went into his dealer's store not expecting an order and with his mind so full of the depressed condition of the territory that he advertised his thoughts by his lagging walk and gloomy expression, and he didn't get an order.

I hear some of you say, "Oh, H——! I tried that hot-air stuff and it didn't work." Yes, you tried and then quit and went on as before. The other fellow tried, sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't, but he kept right on till he had the habit fixed, **AND THAT MAN IS GETTING BUSINESS AND HAS BEEN RIGHT ALONG.**

Monday morning when you wash your face, wash out of your mind every negative thought, and resolve that this coming week your mind can hold nothing but positive thoughts, and stick to it the whole week, no matter what happens. If the weather turns bad again, don't mind it, but stick it out, and even if you don't get any business, you will feel better at the end of the week, and you will have left a trail of optimism and encouragement behind you that will pay you good dividends next time you make that trip.

Try It!

P. S. Does the hen stop scratching because the worms are scarce? **NOT ON YOUR LIFE! SHE SCRATCHES HARDER.**

Citing One's Own Experience. One of the most effective ways that a sales manager has for gaining acceptance of his ideas as to how his men can improve their work, is to relate an experience of his own in which he was in the same position as the man to whom he writes. This, more than anything else, shows the salesman that his sales manager knows what he is talking about—knows from experience.

Full acceptance of ideas expressed in letters depends very much upon whether or not the reader feels that the writer really knows what he is talking about.

A good illustration of this in a letter to salesmen follows:

Some years back when I was a salesman on the road, I too was given to the "promise" habit. It was my regular custom to write the house all about the fine order I expected to get from Joe Jones, or else tell the boss about it personally if I happened to be "in." And, of course, I always expected a few words of commendation upon my brilliant prospects. This quite beside and in addition to what I expected when I got the real order itself.

One day I told of my hopes once too often. I was working under the management of a mighty good fellow, but none the

less strict in the handling of his men. Upon one of my visits at headquarters I began telling him about the dandy line of prospects I had lined up for the coming week. He let me play out my string, meanwhile carrying a sort of quizzical smile on his face. I finished my story, well pleased with the effect I presumed I was making.

Imagine my astonishment when, after passing me his private box of cigars and asking me to have a seat, my good sales manager began on me in the following words: "Eddy, I like you. I like your work. But you've got one glaring fault that I'd like to see you overcome. You boast too much. Not alone about the sales you've made, but almost as much about the sales you expect to make. And you want to be praised both times. You try to cash in twice on the same order. You want me to tell you how glad I am you're going to get all those orders next week. Next week, when you get them, you'll feel hurt if I don't express my pleasure at the volume of business you booked.

"Now, on our books, you get credit for those orders just once, and that's all you're entitled to and all you expect to get. The orders tell the story. Now I don't wish to be placed in the position of being always expected to give you two rounds of applause. You don't need it. So quit telling me about your expectations. Let me have the results. I'll think lots more of you. I won't have any chance to be disappointed when you fail to land the order you told me you were going to get and didn't. You place yourself in an embarrassing and vulnerable position when you come in here and describe what a big order Joe Jones is going to give you, and then perhaps Joe changes his mind and doesn't order at all, or else buys a great deal less than your optimistic imagination had portrayed to me."

I don't remember just what I did. Probably I gulped and looked very much astonished. But it struck home. I never forgot that talk. It made an impression that will always remain. And I minded. I don't think I ever after that tried to get credit for an order more than once to which I was justly entitled.

Nor did I attempt to predict the getting of an order until I had it down in black and white as an absolute, incontrovertible fact. It was a lesson I wish all salesmen could learn as I learned it. Predicting what volume of business will be booked is a serious proposition. The more desirable course is to let the orders tell their own story.

Good Letters Are Friendly Letters. Plainly there is no need to criticize the foregoing letters on the score of their expression of thought. They are written in natural, direct, and simple language; they are not stilted nor artificial, but are vital, and the writers evidently mean what they say. Some of the expressions might be condensed and simplified, but on the whole those letters all ring true. Their tone is always friendly—and that is true of nearly all good letters.

There is seldom, if ever, a place in effective business letter writing for the letter that is unfriendly in tone or spirit.

The letters previously quoted are all sunny tempered, but we sometimes find a sales manager who writes letters that are severe, bitter, sarcastic. Asked why he wrote such letters, one sales manager said, "Oh, we have to. The men won't do a thing if you don't keep stirring them up."

Was he right? If so, it would be an excellent move on his part to discharge his whole force and start building a new one on a platform of friendly relations with the management. There is no question that a sales manager can do more with a fairly friendly set of men than with men who snarl at him like the trained lions in a circus at the crack of the whip.

What, for instance, would be your own "reaction" if you were a salesman on the road and received a letter like this?—

We are at a loss to understand your attitude toward the dealer-help circulars. We advised you in April that one thousand of these had been assigned to your territory and requested shipping directions and a statement of your plans for using them with your trade. You replied, "Hold till further notice," and since then we have not been favored with a word from you re these circulars.

Now, Mr. Heines, we want to see some signs of activity on your part. These circulars have cost the house a lot of money, and that money is a dead loss if you continue to sleep on the job. We are not making circulars for amusement, but to get results. If you think you can hold down your job by loafing around hotel lobbies while we do the work, you have a surprise coming. Wake up and advise us where to send these circulars and how you intend to use them.

Trusting to hear from you at your earliest convenience, we remain

Feeling and Expressing Confidence in Salesmen. A former president of the Chicago Association of Sales Managers says that the secret of successful management is feeling and expressing confidence in the men. This is how he handles his men:

When a new man is employed, I give him to understand that we have confidence in him—otherwise he would not have been employed at all.

I put it this way: "We have agreed on a salary of \$150 a month and \$150 for expenses. That makes \$3,600 a year—the interest on \$60,000. I am asking my house to back up my judgment that you are worth that much. I am just as much interested in your making good as you are. If you fall down, I fall down—the \$60,000 pays no interest. When your sales amount to more than the cost of the goods, plus your salary and expenses, plus the other costs, we begin to make a profit."

The training period lasts two weeks. During that time the man receives expenses, but no salary. After two weeks he decides whether he likes the work and can make good, and we decide whether we want him to try it. If the decision is favorable, he starts on his first trip. Just before he goes, I have a final confidential talk with him, something like this:

"Have you everything you need for the trip?"

"Oh, yes."

"Samples, expense money, everything you need?"

"Yes."

"Isn't there something else you must take with you?"

"I can't think of anything."

"Well, there is something else—something more important than those mentioned, something that you are being intrusted with—that is, the name and reputation of the house, which we want you to bring back untarnished, whether you make a dollar or not. Whatever may happen to you, never do anything that will injure that name and reputation. The merchant judges the house by you. You are its representative."

I use letters to keep up the impression that has been made on him by direct contact with the house. He sends in weekly reports. He has a definite territory, and I know approximately what town he will be in on a certain date. The man in the field must know what goes on between house and customer.

I give the salesman a chance to make a start, and then I begin sending him occasional letters. I take him into my confidence. If a new article has been introduced, I write him a letter about it, and give him to understand that he

is big enough to sell it, giving him facts and talking points which the house will uphold.

There are few salesmen who can spread their efforts. Most men usually neglect certain lines, talking the goods which they personally like best or understand best, doing injustice to the merchant, the house, and themselves. It is up to the house to see that a salesman knows the merits, advantages, and talking facts of every article he has for sale. Letters should bring out the merits of the goods he is not selling. They bring in a new interest. I send a salesman a letter once a week, each time emphasizing a particular line and giving him the selling talk. I tell him to specialize on that article during the next week—it needs boosting.

If I find that he is lying down on the job, I call his attention to the possibilities in the field and still impress on him that we have confidence in him. We believe that he can do better. If it is our fault, we want to know it. If it is his fault, we both want to know it, so that we can remedy it, for his advantage as well as for ours. I write him a letter like this:

Dear Mr. Jones:

In looking over your reports of recent date, we are glad to see that you sold a very nice order to Mr. Hopkins. We hope that you sold him in such a manner that he will be a perpetual customer, not only in the lines that you have already sold him, but in others that you will be able to add from time to time until he is a firm friend of our house.

However, taking your reports as a whole, we believe that you can increase the volume of business in that territory. We wish that you would analyze your efforts and the merchants upon whom you called, and see why it was that you fell down. We are not getting our proportion of the business as we see it, and we believe that you can, by proper analysis and application, sell just as many goods as anyone else in the field.

Your line is right, your prices are right, your profits to the retailer are right, and there is no reason why you should not increase the total volume of your business. If there are any really good reasons why you are not getting a greater volume, we wish you would let us know, so that they can be analyzed and we can see if the fault is at this end or that end. If it is at this end, we will rectify it; if at that end, you can rectify it.

Very truly yours,

This is an illustration that I often use: If 40,000 pounds of a certain article is used in a certain territory, and our salesman sells only 1,000 pounds, he hasn't sold his percentage, unless there are thirty-nine other salesmen in that territory who are just as good salesmen as he is and he and the house are willing to acknowledge it. I write him, "The

volume is there; we want our share of it, and we know that you can get it."

Salesmen play "hookey" sometimes. There is no way of checking up on their expense reports. If they want to be crooked, no system of asking for receipts will do any good. Treat them right and have confidence in them, and make them have confidence in you. Put them on a higher plane. My slogan is, "Help the men to help themselves," that they may become more valuable to both the house and to themselves. You are then building an organization upon a stronger foundation, by co-operation, friendship, and business.

I impress upon the salesman that he is there to do the merchant just as much good as the merchant does him. He should never take an order given as a favor, or upon sympathy, but sell his goods on their merits, that the retailer may dispose of them at a profit and both have satisfied customers. I have torn up orders given as a favor or upon sympathy and in the end done a better business, for the merchant knows it is mutual interest that builds the most profitable results.

Form letters are useful when you want to give general information, but don't make them too high-toned or dignified. Use as personal a tone as possible. Often I add a little personal note to each individual man's letter, fitting his temperament, telling him that I am expecting him to distinguish himself. The form letter should usually contain a description of some line of goods, their merits, talking points, and if possible a sample, but even then you cannot afford to omit the note of personal encouragement—"The house is with you; it stands ready to help you. Build business that is profitable to both."

Many sales managers say in letters what they would not think of saying in a talk. Don't do it. Don't roast. Be sympathetic, encouraging, and helpful. Don't overlook his failures, but show him how to overcome them. He will work a lot harder for a man whom he likes than for one whom he doesn't like. The letter with the ring of personal talk and confidence is the one that goes home—a letter with a sting returns upon you.

Every once in a while the salesman must come back to the house for *recharging* by personal contact. Salesmen's conventions are good things too—they develop interest and promote sales. Don't try to make letters take the place of

direct personal influence—they are two distinct methods of support.

Write your letters as much like a personal talk as you can. Fill them with information, help, and, above all, *confidence*. If you can't have confidence in a man, you should not have him in your employ; he will be profitable neither to the house nor to himself.

One thing to remember in writing letters of all kinds is that it is difficult to avoid expressing our true feelings in the letters we write; therefore, it is important to be sure that our feelings toward the one to whom we write are the kind that, when expressed by the tone of our letter, will most likely cause the letter to gain the result we want.

SELLING BY LETTER

Part II

FOLLOWING UP THE ADVERTISING

BEFORE taking up direct-sales letters—which will be covered in Part III of this executive manual—let us briefly consider the problem of the follow-up letter designed to turn leads from advertising into orders.

Why so little real attention is paid to the writing of effective follow-up letters is hard to say; but if anyone doubts that this is so, he has only to make a test in order to be convinced. Just pick up the current issue of some standard magazine, such as *The Saturday Evening Post* or *The Literary Digest*, select twenty-five advertisements of products or services in which you might be interested, and write asking for further information. You will then find out how little real thought has been put on this essential of following up the advertising.

Some of your inquiries will not be answered at all. Others will get replies in a formal, conventional tone, which is likely to kill any interest that you may have felt in the thing advertised. Few of your inquiries will be answered with real letters. Many of your replies will not come promptly. Some may be as much as six months in arriving.

The Weakest Link in the Chain. It is hard to realize the general lack of intelligent attention to follow-up letters until the test just mentioned has been made; for it is well known that space in the leading periodicals is very expensive. And yet many houses that spend large sums of money for advertising space give very little attention to the proper handling of inquiries produced by the advertising. In many cases, the way in which such inquiries are followed up is the weakest link in the whole marketing chain, from the planning of a campaign to

the last step in the service to the customer and the collecting of the money.

The first links in this chain are the efforts to find prospective buyers, while the last links are the serving of the customer and the collecting of payment. Between them comes this matter of handling the inquiries, an important part of the process of transforming prospects into customers.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that while the other links are made of strong steel, this one is often nothing but a piece of string. No elaboration of this idea is needed. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and anyone who has seen the strange neglect of the middle link will understand why so many advertising campaigns are unproductive.

Probably some advertising men will reply that the advertisements are not intended to bring business directly to the house. They are meant to create interest in the product, which will cause the reader to go to his nearest dealer. But this is not a satisfactory explanation. When you send in your inquiry, how does the advertiser know that you are not a dealer? And is it not true that the people who take the trouble to write are usually the best prospects and well worth cultivating?

How One Inquiry Was Handled. Following is a letter received in response to an inquiry about roofing material:

Dear Sir:

We have received your letter of August 10, requesting information regarding our roofing.

We are pleased to inclose descriptive literature regarding the various grades of roofing manufactured by this company, which we believe will give more detailed information than we could give you by correspondence.

We hope that the literature we are sending you gives you the desired information and shall be pleased to hear from you further.

Yours very truly,

That is a lazy way of handling a matter of considerable importance. How does such a letter impress the

reader? He is likely to feel that this company is not eager for his business. If the letter is really read with attention (such letters seldom are so read), the reader, especially if he is a business man, feels that a conscientious clerk is following instructions and sending out "form letter 27" to all inquirers.

As a general rule, all letters in answer to the inquiries of prospective customers should be so prepared as to impress the reader with the fact that his inquiry has had careful individual attention.

In the case just cited, the inquiry was individual; the answer is a bit of routine. The inquiry was a matter of real interest to the writer; the answer is polite, but indifferent. The inquiry was specific; the answer is general and noncommittal.

How This Inquiry Should Have Been Handled. Let us imagine that this inquiry was the only one received by that house in the whole season, and that the entire year's business depended on the reply—which is a good attitude to take toward all such inquiries—and let us suppose that the proprietor himself writes the letter.

In answering the inquiries of prospective buyers, imagine that the very life of the business depends upon your letter and that you are the proprietor of the business.

Read the letter again with that thought in mind, and see how it sounds. Would any sane business man under those conditions write such a letter? Of course not. Such rank indifference to the issues at stake would be idiotic. Applying the principle stated (which, by the way, is really the ownership-interest principle stated in Part II of Executive Manual 1), he would answer this inquiry somewhat as follows:

Dear Sir:

I am very glad to hear that you are considering our roofing. Mr. Van Steen, our construction expert, will call on you tomorrow afternoon with a full outfit of samples, specifications, and charts, and I hope you will go into the matter quite fully and feel free to call on us for any information you want. We

are prepared to convince you of the superior merits of our roofing and our unequaled facilities for prompt and thoroly satisfactory construction work of the highest grade.

I suggest that you call up the Western Canning Company and the Hartwell Wheel Works and get their opinion of the work we did for them last year. In the meantime will you just look over the descriptive matter that I am inclosing, and make notes of any questions that you want to ask Mr. Van Steen?

When Inquiries Are Efficiently Handled. Suppose 100,000 inquiries are received in the course of a year. One of these inquiries represents only a minute part of the total business that the house has an opportunity to secure. But is that any reason why it should be intrusted to a low-salaried, comparatively untrained man? If many or all the inquiries are so handled, the result is that only 2 or maybe 3 per cent of the inquiries are turned into orders, instead of 10, 20, or 30 per cent.

Those 100,000 inquiries cost, say, \$1 apiece. The cost of handling is perhaps 20 cents. The total cost of 100,000 inquiries and their replies is, therefore, \$120,000. Then, if only 2,000 or 3,000 orders are secured, the cost of each order is up around \$40 or \$60.

Now let us suppose that this house decides to spend more money on the handling of its inquiries. It employs a specially trained man for this work and increases the cost of handling to 40 cents an inquiry. The total cost of the inquiries and the replies for one year would then be \$140,000. But if, thru more efficient handling of these inquiries, 4,000 or 6,000 orders were secured—if the percentage of inquiries turned into orders was doubled, as might easily be the case—it would reduce the cost of each order to \$23.33 or \$35. Thus the margin of net profit on each order filled is greatly increased by the reduction of selling expense—and the number of orders filled is doubled!

As a general rule, it pays well to spend money on letters answering inquiries, for good letters will reduce the cost of turning inquiries into orders and increase the number of orders thus developed.

Of course, in practice there are many things to be considered, but that does not affect the essential soundness of the point made here. The truth is that the gain to the business would usually be much greater than the figures used indicate, because a good customer is usually a "repeater," and because the building of good will is a cumulative thing, the complete value of which can never be estimated.

Why Important Letters Suffer Neglect. The reasons for the strange neglect of one of the vital processes in marketing—the follow-up on inquiries—are not altogether clear, but one reason may be easily seen. It applies to letters of many kinds, as well as to following up inquiries.

A century ago most businesses were small; the proprietor could write all the letters himself or have them written by a secretary who understood the needs of the business as well as he himself did. To-day we have businesses that employ thousands of people. Every part of the work in these large concerns must be parceled out and handed down thru grade after grade of subordinates. In this process the letters have lost their personal character and have become artificial. They are mostly written by poorly paid and poorly trained assistants.

With improved facilities of reproduction, there has been an enormous increase in the number of letters produced—and a corresponding loss in the power of letters to interest and influence their readers. Nearly everybody receives a flood of letters; they come by every mail. Selling letters of one kind or another have become so common that they must be exceptionally good letters in order to command any attention at all on the part of those to whom they are sent.

The efficient letter writer always takes into consideration the fact that he must overcome the general indifference of the public toward letters of all kinds.

But great things can be done—are being done to-day—by those who really know how to write good letters.

Every executive must thoroly understand the real possibilities of letters. When the heads of a business realize the weakness of the present practice of their correspondents, they will be led to look for more efficient letter writers. Many have already done this. They understand the great importance of true efficiency at all points where the activities of their businesses come into direct contact with their customers and prospective customers.

Good Work in Handling Inquiries. It would be unfair to say that all businesses are weak in the handling of inquiries. The great mail order houses and some others have given special attention to this matter and have developed some very efficient writers of follow-up letters. Good work in handling an inquiry is shown in the following case, which illustrates the best practice of letter writers in one of the large mail order houses. The inquiry was as follows:

Gentlemen:

I want some furnishings for my new country home.

Will you please send me samples of some fabric suitable for southern windows in a living room? I wish some strong, simple, comfortable dining-room chairs. Have you some suitable, inexpensive style of porch furniture?

I should like to have you send me your catalog. In addition, may I ask whether you carry the Black Gem gas oven?

Sincerely yours,

Here is the letter sent in reply to that inquiry:

Dear Madam:

For your living room we suggest sundour. It washes well and does not fade in the sunlight. It comes in soft shades in all colors. It varies in thickness, some of it being as thin as raw silk and some of it quite heavy. No. 14K5355, page 1156 of the catalog we are mailing, is an extremely fine quality and sells at \$1 a yard; but if you prefer something even better, we have a grade at \$1.50 a yard, 14K5358, also on page 1156. As you will notice, there are several qualities ranging between these prices, all of which come in a 54-inch width.

Another very serviceable, inexpensive, but rich-looking fabric is a good quality cretonne in a tapestry design, such as that shown in No. 14K5325, page 117. This is 36 inches in width, and sells at 85 cents a yard. Almost the exact effect of tapestry can be secured by edging this with No. 12K2090, page 580, an edging matching any of our cretonnes.

While we feel that you will be able to find what you want in these samples which we have inclosed, we shall be glad to send you any others you may find in our catalog.

You will no doubt be interested in the illustrations of dining-room chairs, Nos. 2K25 and 2K27, on page 1089. One is an adaptation of a Colonial style and the other a design of arts and craft furniture. We advise these styles because of their plain, straight lines and sturdy construction; also because of the particularly comfortable curve of the chair back. We also recommend a wax finish instead of a high polish, not only because it demands less care, but because it gives that refined simplicity one always looks for in a quiet sunny country home.

Don't you think that the two-tone rug, No. 6K10431, page 1054, which while very cool in appearance is very substantial, would be most suitable for your porch? Then, of course, two rocking chairs and possibly a table if there is sufficient room would certainly give it a very comfortable appearance. There is a complete line of porch furniture, including reed and willow, on pages 985 to 991. The reed furniture is a little more expensive than the willow, but it takes a better stain and is more durable.

While we do not carry the Black Gem gas oven, you no doubt will find satisfaction in the Blue Flame, No. 4K496, page 18. It burns less gas, as there is a special inner lining of asbestos to retain the heat in the oven, and its especially wide flues assure even baking, just as brown on top as on the bottom.

You can order any of this material or any other goods in our catalog, feeling sure that it is exactly as described and illustrated. Unless you are thoroly pleased with it, we will very gladly refund, not only the purchase price, but the transportation charges you have paid.

For your convenience we are inclosing an order blank. It is very simple to order by means of this blank, as you merely note down each item you desire, and your goods will reach you promptly without the inconvenience of a trip to town or the annoyance of shopping.

Yours very truly,

What are the things about that letter which make it a good letter in handling the foregoing inquiry? There are at least nine points in its favor, as follows:

1. A thoro and complete answer is given to every question asked in the inquiry.
2. Eagerness to supply exactly what is wanted is suggested by offering additional samples, altho the reader's desire for them is effectively forestalled.
3. By suggesting edging, the way is opened for an additional sale.
4. The correspondent briefly pictures the goods for the customer, especially in the suggestions for porch furniture.

5. The ideas of refinement, comfort, and economy have been observed thruout the letter.
6. Every opportunity has been seized upon to turn the attention of the customer to the catalog.
7. Altho the particular make of oven called for is not carried, the negative side of this fact is removed.
8. The guaranty is well used; it plays a strong part in the salesmanship of this letter.
9. Ordering is made as easy as possible. The order blank is not an obvious "sales bait," but merely a "convenience" for the customer.

We may sum the whole thing up by saying that the correspondent who handles inquiries should use exactly the same methods that he would use if he were an efficient salesman selling his product or service face to face with his prospect. He should study his customer, make every effort to meet his wishes and needs, arrange everything for him in the most convenient way possible, put his message in simple, natural language—and leave the prospect free to decide for himself.

SELLING BY LETTER

Part III

DIRECT-MAIL SELLING

WE NOW come to the third use of letters in the sales department—going directly to a list of prospects by letter without waiting for them to show interest.

This kind of selling by letter, commonly called “direct-mail selling,” has grown up within the memory of almost every adult. Most of us can remember when a circular letter was scornfully pointed out as a transparent device for deluding the reader. To-day the circular sales letter is everywhere. It comes to our desks in the morning and to our homes at night. We no longer look at it with the suspicion that some one is trying to delude us into thinking that it was individually dictated.

But, as commonly used as it is to-day, the form sales letter has not yet reached its full development. Many more business firms will probably come to use it; for, rightly used and effectively written, the form sales letter is found to be a paying method of promoting sales in many lines of business.

A well-planned and prepared direct-mail selling campaign will serve, in many cases, to increase the sales volume at a lower cost of selling.

Where and when can this be done? How can a sales manager determine beforehand whether sales letters will be profitable in his work? There are several important considerations in answering that question, all of which must have careful attention.

Determining Whether or Not Mail Selling Will Pay. Suppose you are manufacturing a household article that sells for \$5 retail. It is a desirable article to have in almost any household, but is not indispensable. On the

whole, you feel that every family whose income is \$5,000 a year ought to be a good prospect. Those with smaller incomes are doubtful.

You decide to try a letter on a list of 1,000 names of the \$5,000 class, the names being secured from a list of business executives. The 1,000 letters with a small inclosed circular cost you \$50. Orders are received from 2 per cent; that is, your letters bring in 20 orders. Then the mail-selling cost of each order is \$2.50, which is probably more than you can afford.

Next, you secure a list of 10,000 families that have already purchased a patented household device. You try your letter on this list. The larger quantity reduces the cost of the letters to \$45 per 1,000. You receive orders from 4 per cent of this select list of names, or 40 orders per 1,000 names. This reduces the mail-selling cost of each order to \$1.125, which will probably leave you a profit.

In direct-mail selling campaigns, every letter and every list should be fairly tested as to the returns before the mailing is sent to a large list of names.

It is sometimes said that a 2 per cent return on a sales letter is a good showing. This doesn't mean anything. It may or may not be profitable selling. This depends upon the margin between cost and selling price; also, whether or not the first sale may or may not lead to other sales. One-fiftieth of 1 per cent might be highly profitable for a \$5,000 automobile, since it would mean a selling cost of only \$250, or 5 per cent.

In practice, this matter of determining the minimum percentage of sales that would be profitable is seldom simple. Complications appear, for instance, when the selling letters are only part of the selling process, as when the orders are to be taken by salesmen or are to be filled by dealers or other outside distributors; or when the letters aim to send buyers into the dealers' stores. When a firm advertises in national magazines, in the

daily papers, and in street cars; sends salesmen to dealers; and uses letters to precede or follow up the calls of salesmen, it is all but impossible to determine exactly whether or not these letters are profitable; their exact selling influence apart from the selling influence of the salesmen and the advertising with which they are combined, can be only approximately determined.

But in all cases that are simple enough to allow a calculation of the expense of selling by letter, it is the percentage of sales to letters that determines whether the process is profitable or not.

Using the Law of Averages. If you have a list of 10,000 or 100,000 names and you want to know whether or not it will pay to circularize it, make a *representative* selection of 500 names and try your letter on them. You will get approximately the same return on the entire list as you get on the 500 names—if you use great care in choosing the 500 names. They should not be from one locality (unless the whole list is local), nor from one part of the alphabet, nor from one occupation if several are represented; but in every possible way, the 500 names should be a true sample of the list.

If the 500 are properly selected, the percentage of orders shown may be fully relied upon when you work the whole list of names, since the average is unvarying—for the given conditions.

In testing the returns from letters, make all the conditions of the test as nearly as possible like the conditions that will obtain when working the entire list of names.

One test will not do for another product or another letter or another season, or for any conditions that are essentially different from those obtaining in the test.

The most instructive tests are those that compare two products or two letters or two offers, other conditions being the same. If two different letters are sent to 200 or 300 names, each chosen from the same list, you will

get a very accurate comparison of the pulling power of the two letters—unless these are essential differences in the two groups of names to which the letters are sent.

It is comparatively easy, in a simple campaign direct to the customer, to determine beforehand whether a sales letter will pay or not, or to determine which of two or more letters is the better, or what class of people will respond most readily to your proposition, etc.—by making proper use of the law of averages in test mailings.

Making Up Good Lists of Names. In planning a letter campaign, the first question, and one of the most important, is that of the list of names to which the letters are to be sent. Here is a weak spot in most letter campaigns. Advertisers who spend days or weeks in planning the letters and other material sometimes neglect altogether this important matter of making sure that their lists of names are the right ones to use in order to get good results. If the list is half “deadwood,” then the cost of half the letters sent out is pure waste—and an otherwise profitable campaign may be turned into a money loser. If the list includes certain classes of names of people who are clearly not prospective buyers, here again is pure waste if letters are sent to these classes—altho, of course, there may not be sufficient information about each name to enable the advertiser to reclassify his list. However—

Every possible means should be used to weed out from the list all names which are known to be names from which returns cannot be expected to come.

The names may come from many sources. One source of names is the city directory. Since selected names are usually wanted, this source can seldom be used, but the classifications found in these city directories sometimes help. Telephone books are another source of names. They usually contain a section which lists the names of business firms by classes. The large credit-rating books, such as *Dun's* and *Bradstreet's*, and the Thomas catalog of manufacturers are the sources of many lists. These

large lists give much information that is useful in making up lists of definite classes of prospects. Special lists of trades and professions and membership lists of national associations may be found in the public libraries.

Once a list is made up, it should not be allowed to stand unrevised for months or years. The names on all mail that is returned undelivered should be immediately removed from the list, or corrected; every possible means should be employed to discover and eliminate the people who are not real prospects.

Every useless name cut out of a mailing list and all other improvements in the quality of names from the standpoint of the probability of securing orders from them, cut the cost of orders.

The approved method of keeping lists is to put each name on a card, which should be large enough to contain all the information that will be needed later. This often includes the source of the name, personal data, business connections, rating, literature sent, and the response, if any; in brief, any facts that may prove useful in classifying the names so that the selling letters may be better adapted to the readers. But it is possible, of course, to overdo the fullness of the record; good judgment is needed to determine just what facts should be put on the cards.

Recording Returns from Letters. Every efficient mail advertiser keeps a record of each campaign and each letter used. A separate card or a page in the record book should be devoted to each letter and should give the following information:

1. Subject of the letter.
2. List used.
3. First words of the letter.
4. Key number of letters.
5. Number of letters sent out.
6. Amount of postage.
7. Envelope.
8. Inclosures.

9. Date and house order number.
10. Cost.
11. Special data.

Charts are useful in the study of letter returns. Figures 1 and 2 show two simple forms of charts. In Figure 1 the returns are indicated by days. In Figure 2 the rec-

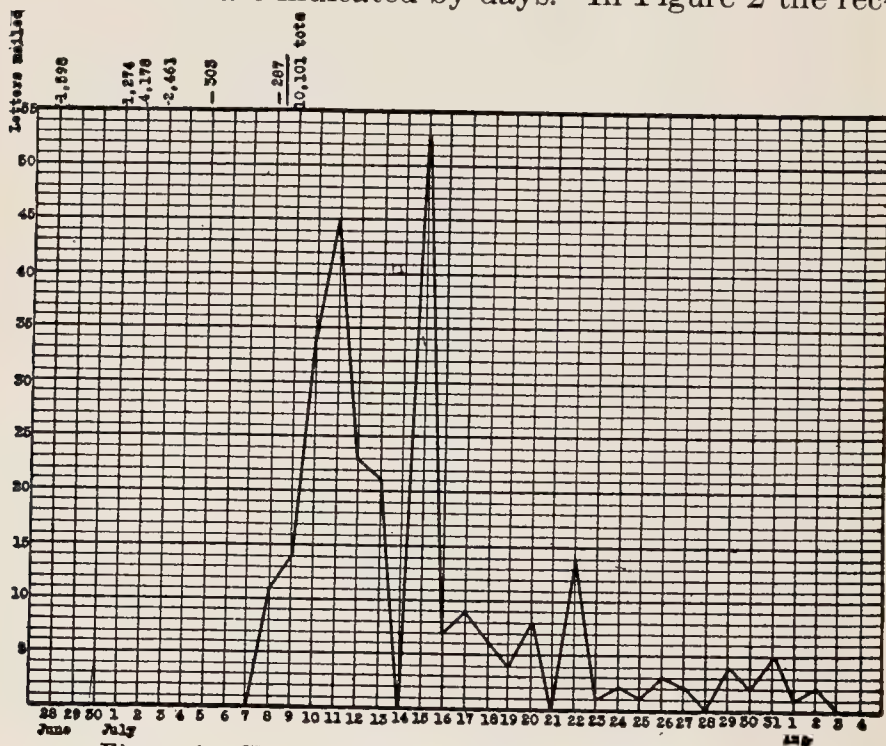


Figure 1. Chart of sales made by a circular letter.

ord is cumulative, the total return to date being given for each day. It will be noticed that the high point is reached very soon after the replies begin coming in, and that after the high point there is a rapid drop and then a long, slow decline. The real high point in this case was reached on July 11; the height of the line of July 15 is due to the fact that the 14th was Sunday.

Planning the Series of Letters. Circular letters are commonly planned in series of from two to a dozen or more. After the first letter is sent to a prospect, the follow-up letters are usually mailed out one or two weeks apart. Sometimes many follow-ups are mailed before giving up

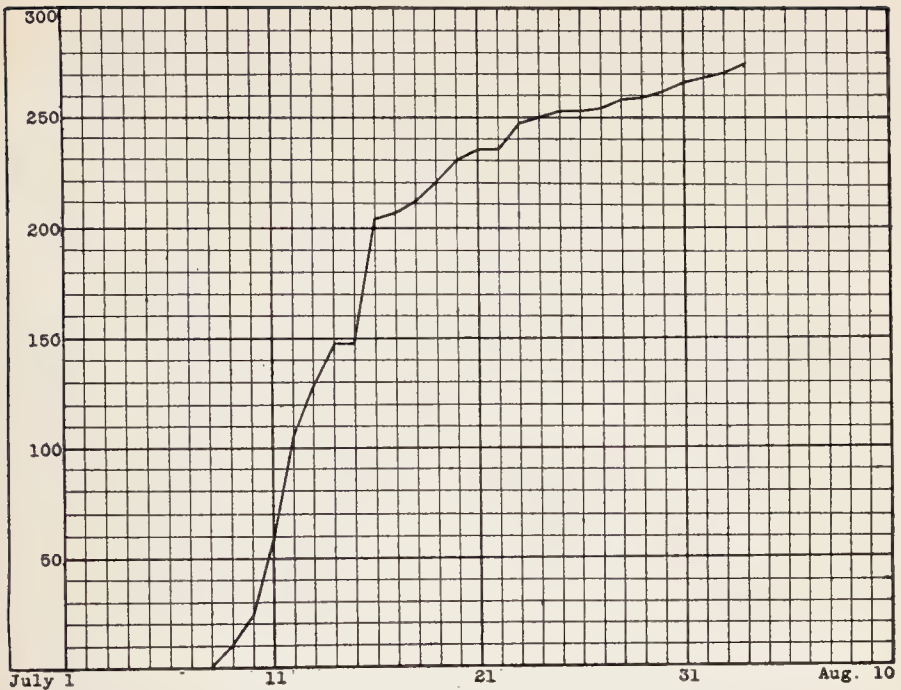


Figure 2. Cumulative chart of same letter as shown in Figure 1, showing total sales to date for each day.

hope of landing the prospect. There is at least one very successful case on record where forty-eight letters were sent. It cost over \$12 to send the entire series to a prospect; but it paid to send them. The gross profit on one sale in this case was \$250. Thus only about one in twenty of the prospects who received the entire series had to reply in order to pay the cost.

Some selling by letter is not planned in series; the advertiser simply decides now and then to send out another letter. But in nearly all letter campaigns, it is well to see the end from the beginning, and decide at the start what each letter shall say, what offers and inducements shall be brought forward at each step, the mailing dates, the inclosures, and everything else.

In nearly all cases a well-planned series of letters will bring better results than the practice of now and then sending out another letter as the spirit moves you.

The Relationship of Letters in a Series. Some difference of opinion exists as to the proper relation of the letters in a series to each other. Shall they be like the sections of a continued story, the reader being kept in suspense until the end, or shall the writer fire all his guns in each letter?

Many experienced advertisers have found that it pays to tell their whole story in each letter, but to emphasize a different selling point in each letter, because one point will probably be a greater buying appeal to one prospect than to another.

Here are three letters from one series. You will notice that each letter emphasizes a distinct selling point, and that each letter also tries for a favorable response.

Gentlemen:

A good cup of coffee is one of the best assets of your dining room.

Assure yourself of the best coffee by serving **HART COFFEE**.

This brand is famous for its superior qualities for hotel, restaurant, and club use.

It is used by the leading hotels, clubs, railroad eating houses and dining cars, and other places where exacting patrons are drawn by excellent coffee.

Will you give our representative an opportunity to explain the facts about **HART COFFEE**?

Mail back the card—thank you.

Yours very truly,

Gentlemen:

HART COFFEE is made under the most exacting conditions.

It is because of the care which is exercised in procuring, inspecting, roasting, and processing this coffee that it is so good and so wholesome.

Every man in this establishment has been drilled and developed under Mr. Hart's personal supervision.

Under present circumstances a good cup of this coffee will mean more to you in pleasing your guests than ever before, and we urge a demonstration of **HART COFFEE**.

Make an appointment for our representative to call at a convenient time by noting on the inclosed return post card.

We feel sure that this will be greatly to your advantage.

Yours very truly,

Gentlemen:

What is breakfast without a cup of **GOOD** coffee?

Coffee is the one item above all others that can make or break your success in pleasing patrons at breakfast time.

Because of its remarkable goodness HART COFFEE is especially adapted to the exacting needs of hotels, clubs, and restaurants—whose patrons want to start the day right.

We are eager to have you try this coffee, and we urge you to note on the post card at what time it would be convenient for you to talk coffee with our representative.

We shall especially appreciate this privilege.

Yours very truly,

A Series of Postal Cards. Here is a successful series of three postal cards sent out by a movie house. On the first two cards, the same selling appeal is presented in different ways, while on the third card, the selling appeal is different.

I

We're going to show a picture at our theater that I'd like to have you see. I can't describe it—nobody can, but everybody says it is different from the others. It isn't like a show at all, but just as if your own mother's face were looking at you from the screen. You know—the way she used to look. It's a queer thing that a man can make a story that every man and woman feels is the story of his or her own life, but that's what Mr. Hughes has done. It's called **THE OLD NEST**. As I say, I can't describe it, but—well, just come and see it!

II

Picture-show men are not much given to emotion—I suppose we see so much of it that we get toughened. But the other day a bunch of us saw **THE OLD NEST**, and every man jack of us went out and sent a message to his mother! Can you beat that?

I'd like to have you see that picture. It will hit you pretty hard, but a man feels better when he has laughed a lot and maybe cried a little over a piece of real life. It's all about a mother—your mother, and how she felt when you left home. The critics say that Miss Alden's face in these great scenes is the most wonderful thing that has ever been shown on the screen, but you won't think about that—you'll be thinking about your own mother!

III

Somehow we can't say the usual things about **THE OLD NEST**. "Greatest ever" and "finest achievement of screen art" and so on don't seem to cover it. There's something sacred about it, and people who have seen it are too much choked up to talk much.

All we can say is—Don't miss it! If you see it, you will never forget it. If you don't see it, you will never stop regretting it when you hear your friends discussing it. Maybe some of your friends have seen it already. Ask them. They won't try to describe it; they'll just say, "Oh, it's wonderful! Don't miss it!"

Offering a Special Inducement in the Last Letter. Sometimes it is possible to hold a special offer until the last letter in the series, bringing it up as a last resort when all else has failed.

The disadvantage of this plan is, of course, that it is expensive; many letters are used on prospects who would have ordered at once had the special inducement been offered in the first letter. On the other hand, there is undoubtedly something in the cumulative effect—the first letter makes the prospect think; the second brings him near a decision; and the third tips the balance and gets the result. However—

The experience of many business houses indicates that the letter writer should make every effort to get a favorable response in his first letter.

Nothing that will help should be held back in the first letter. Then, where the first attack fails, other letters should present the main selling points from different points of view and with different degrees of emphasis; also any additional selling points that might prove effective in certain cases—and each letter should be in itself a complete attempt to get favorable action.

The Question of Inclosures. Inclosures in sales letters range from the simplest order blank to the most elaborate and artistic booklet; and sometimes a sample, as of cloth or even of wood, is inclosed with the letter. Altho, in general, a letter should stand alone so far as possible, yet nothing essential should be omitted which is necessary to make it accomplish its mission.

Of the various kinds of printed inclosures, tests show that the booklet gets more attention than the large folded sheet, the card, or any other form.

One inclosure is better than several, if it tells the whole story. The inclosure is most effective when it sticks closely to the subject of the letter. A miscellaneous lot of circulars on various products seldom gets a response. On the other hand, a small circular slipped into all letters gets some business—not a great deal.

It is better to use inclosures as parts of a carefully thought-out plan which follows one line of attack from start to finish.

In deciding for or against inclosures, each letter in each case must be considered separately. There is really no general rule other than to exercise good common sense in each individual case when answering the question of inclosures.

PLANNING A LETTER CAMPAIGN

The chief element of success in mail-sales campaigns is the plan—the idea, developed by applying sound selling sense.

The advertiser who merely decides to “send out some letters on our product” is foredoomed to failure. He should begin by asking himself, “What have I?” “What is it good for?” “Who are the people who need it?” “Where are they?” “How can they be made to recognize their need?” “What appeal would affect me if I were in their place?” “What special inducements would attract me?” “How could I be led step by step to a final decision?”

Developing Effective Selling-Letter Ideas. Many advertisers feel that they lack originality and “ideas.” The trouble is usually that they do not think the thing out in a simple, logical way. If they would shut out all thoughts of method and technique until their real message to their prospective buyers is clear in their minds, the “ideas” would probably come of themselves.

If you have a new kind of electric ironer or vulcanizer or anything which you are sure will be a boon to buyers, don't start by considering the technique of your letter plan, but study your product from every angle in its relation to those who will buy it. Be sure you **KNOW** your product in relation to your market, as emphasized in the first executive manual in the section of this training service on selling and sales management. If your mind is full

of the wonderful merits of your device, and you know exactly how your prospective buyers feel about such things, and you know how to sell them in a personal interview, as explained in Executive Manual 20, then you are ready to develop your campaign, and you will not lack ideas.

A sales-letter writer must first make sure that he is full of the selling message—which is his true source of selling ideas for his letters.

A vast amount of "business literature" has been written on the subject of sales-letter writing. Dozens of books and thousands of magazine articles testify to the immense thought that has been devoted to building up a "science" of the subject. But when all these thoughts are sifted down to hard pan, we cannot escape the conclusion that the fundamental principles are few and simple, as set forth previously in our study of salesmanship and of psychology. Let us here, however, consider these fundamentals in their application to the writing of successful selling letters.

First, Know the Product or Service. First of all, as stated before, the letter writer must know his product—have a deep conviction that it is needed and a full knowledge of why it is needed. He must not say, "I will get out a few selling letters on our product (or service)," but must be so full of his message that he cannot help writing it.

If you cannot think of anything to put into your letters, the trouble is not with your knowledge of letters, but with your knowledge of your goods or the service you are selling.

A successful writer of selling letters "lives" with his product until he cannot think or talk about anything else.

It is apparent that the writer of the following letter knows his product in relation to his market (milk-product manufacturers in this case); he is thoroly convinced

himself of their need for Westinghouse motors, and he has clearly established the reasons for that need:

Dear Sir:

When you use Westinghouse motors for operating your machinery, you have the **BEST POSSIBLE DRIVE**. We say this advisedly and with full appreciation of the meaning of these words.

Here are some of the reasons why we know this statement is true:

RELIABILITY—Westinghouse motors give thoroly satisfactory service for years with very little attention, and provide the best possible insurance against shutdowns from power troubles. This is the long-time experience of users. See the list inclosed.

ECONOMY—These motors consume minimum current for performing a given amount of work. Your power bills will be **LOW**.

SPECIAL FEATURES—Smooth, highly finished frames which are easily kept clean; moisture-proof windings, essential for good operation in damp places; dust-proof bearings; great mechanical strength, due to the extensive use of rolled steel for construction.

PROPER APPLICATION—An extensive line of motors. Wide experience with the drive of milk-products machinery enables us to furnish exactly the right motor for each of your machines, from a feed cutter to a refrigerating machine.

SERVICE—We give your installation the personal attention of long-experienced men. We are as much interested in the complete success of our motors during the fifth year or the tenth year of operation as during the first year.

The inclosed publications describe the Westinghouse motors generally used for driving milk-products machinery.

Let us give you full information about Westinghouse motors for your machines. Fill out and mail the inclosed card.

Very truly yours,

Be Sure You Know Your Reader. The vital matter of knowing your reader goes hand in hand with knowing your product or service, as intimated in the foregoing section. Many "selling" letters seem not to be aimed at anybody in particular, not even at the "average man."

A selling letter should be aimed or written to a definite individual who typifies the one class of prospects to whom the letter is sent.

One successful advertiser says that when he is planning a sales letter, he dictates it, has it typed, and then puts himself in the position of the reader and tries to tear it to pieces. He thinks of every possible objection and counterargument and attacks his own letter as fiercely

as if he had nothing to do with its making. Then he rewrites the whole thing.

Unless we vigorously and relentlessly criticize our letters from the point of view of the reader, we are likely to set up in our minds a fictitious reader who is either childishly simple, influenced by the most transparent devices and the silliest flattery, or is extremely "hard boiled" and unreceptive to human appeals. When the writer of such a letter unexpectedly meets one of his readers, he usually gets a shock. He then may see that human nature is all alike in its fundamental desires and that the differences are mainly on the surface. Yet it is important that the letter writer know how his reader differs from other classes of readers.

The successful letter writer plans his letters, not only for real men (or women), but for definite kinds of men or women.

Day laborers and college professors and country storekeepers and railroad conductors and trained nurses and business executives and dentists and clergymen are different kinds of people. They have certain fundamental qualities in common, but many of their ideas are strongly colored by their lives and surroundings. We must know the attitude of the particular kind of people to whom we are writing, toward our proposition.

Knowing the Reader's Attitude. If we are writing a letter to persuade housewives to try our brand of flour, for example, we must be acquainted not only with the general habits of mind of housekeepers, but also with their ideas about flour. This requirement may be so apparent to every letter writer as to seem hardly worth mentioning. But it is often overlooked and should be emphasized.

Success in writing selling letters depends greatly upon having a thoro and accurate grasp of the reader's attitude toward the thing that is being sold.

One well-known authority on letter writing uses a tell-

ing phrase that applies at this point. He says we must "get in step with the reader's thought." Much might be written in the working out of this idea, but the reader's own reflection will do it just as well. The following letter (written by a man) shows that he knows how women feel about a baby's clothes:

The cutest little baby in the world! Why, it's your little tot, of course.

All dressed up in its snow-white robe with lacy bonnet—its silken bootees peeping from out the downy coverlet of its buggy—why bless its heart, there's not a child in all creation half so sweet as baby.

Of course, all the fine clothes in the world wouldn't make you love baby one bit more. But just picture baby in one of these dainty silken little dresses, face beaming from out of the folds of one of these cute lace bonnets, and "footsies" decked with these satin bootees. Now who in all creation could help falling in love with baby?

Just see these sweet little "duds." Why, our buyers have scoured all corners of the universe to find bonnets dainty enough, bootees cute enough, and dresses sweet enough for baby. And see how well they've succeeded.

Just look at that adorable dainty lace bonnet, No. 24089, page 1368, of our latest catalog. And see, etc.

Avoid Questionable Statements. Now consider another principle of good salesmanship universally applied in successful letter writing:

A writer of successful selling letters always avoids making a statement that the reader can dispute.

If anything is said with which the reader may disagree, it must be supported by facts until it is completely established. Don't make any sweeping claims for the thing you are selling unless you prove these claims on the spot. Don't even say, "You need this motor," or this automobile lock, or anything unless you can immediately demonstrate the need beyond question. Don't make any loose statements to which the reader could take exceptions; but make sure that the reader will believe everything you say. Not only tell the truth, but also make sure that it will be accepted as such.

Stick to One Subject. Another established rule is that

you must stick to your subject. It is easier to sell one thing than two. Don't wander. Cut out every word that may start the reader on a different line of thought. Hold him to the essential question. The broad discussion of general matters, tho often indulged in, is a practice of very doubtful value. Readers are impatient nowadays. They want to get your message quickly and clearly. Be frank, direct, and fearless in hitting the nail on the head. The object of your letter is to gain a favorable decision and action on your proposition. This can seldom be done in ten lines. You must hold the reader's mind on the thing long enough to enable him to arrive at a favorable decision and to act in accordance with it.

Appealing to Reason and Feelings. As clearly explained in the section on advertising, there are two ways in which we can influence another's action. In practice they are usually combined, but the letter writer should be conscious of them as distinct elements. They are the appeal to reason and the appeal to feeling.

If man were really a logical animal, a sales letter would need nothing but a clear and convincing argument; but every close observer of humanity knows that such is not the case. One witty philosopher has observed that "logic is that by which we explain the things we do by instinct." In other words, we act because we want to act and not because we know we should. The action trigger is pulled by feeling, not by the mind.

The letter writer, like the salesman, must appeal to his prospect's emotional nature (his feelings) as well as to his reason.

If you will read any great speech by a successful orator, you will see how clearly he kept this twofold appeal before him in planning his work. The logic is clear and convincing, but there is more than this. The speaker's enthusiasm, his own deep conviction, is the real moving influence. He keeps it under control; he does not talk about it openly; but it shines thru his words like a great

inner fire, and its glowing heat warms you into the desire for action. Something like this must be put into sales letters.

There is one precaution, however. The successful letter writer does keep his feeling under control. He knows that his reader will not act merely because he himself is enthusiastic. He remembers that his reader is a free agent. He talks reason.

Restrained enthusiasm, tempered with reason, is one of the most powerful elements in nearly all successful selling letters.

The first thing for the letter writer to do is actually to have the feeling; the second thing is to let this feeling show thru the argument—in spite of his restraint, as it were. Many sales-letter writers make the mistake of expressing feeling or emotion openly. That immediately repels the reader. He must be made to respect his own decision to buy. This requires an adequate reason for buying, as well as the impulse to buy. As explained in Executive Manual 20, the prospect desires self-approval and the approval of others. Altho he is greatly influenced by feeling, he would not care to admit that his mere feelings had anything to do with his decision to buy.

When Feeling Is Put into a Letter. Let us now note the difference in letters that do and do not appeal to the reader's feelings as well as to his reason. First, a letter that lacks the appeal to the feelings—a letter sent out by a summer resort:

Dear Sir:

I have your letter of the 24th inquiring as to rates and accommodations at "Ocean Nook," and herewith beg to inclose diagram showing location of rooms, etc., and will submit for your approval the following rates:

One person, \$17.50 to \$28 a week; two persons in one room, \$35 to \$49, according to size and location of room. Double rooms with bath, \$56 to \$70 a week.

Under separate cover, I have mailed you one of our booklets, which will give you a very good description of "Ocean Nook" and Portland, and I trust that it may be attractive enough to bring you to our hotel.

Should you wish to ask any further questions in reference to our resort, I will be most happy to give you the desired information. Should you decide to come to "Ocean Nook," and will advise me as to the number in your party, date of arrival, and length of stay, I can then offer for your consideration such rooms as I may have at my disposal for the time you wish them.

Thanking you for your inquiry, and trusting that we may be favored with your patronage, I am

Very truly yours,

That letter, without any appeal to the feelings, was abandoned in favor of the following letter, which secured notably better results:

Dear Sir:

We shall be glad to welcome you to "Ocean Nook," for I'm sure we can give you a good time. You will find out all about the golf, tennis, boating, bathing, fishing, and excursion arrangements from the booklet we are sending you. The hotel stands close to the ocean, surrounded with well-kept lawns and beautiful trees. Every room faces the sea, and the ocean brézes give us cool nights all summer long. The fine old city of Portland is only three miles away, and excellent roads connect us with all points of interest in this part of the state.

"Ocean Nook" is the favorite resort of many of the best families in New England, and this steady patronage makes it possible for us to quote very reasonable rates. For one person we charge \$17.50 to \$28 a week. Two persons can be accommodated in one room for \$35 to \$49. Double rooms with bath are \$56 to \$70.

If you will let me know at once how many are in your party, when you think of coming, and the length of your stay, I will give you exact descriptions of the rooms that you may have at that time.

Very cordially yours,

The writer of that letter was full of restrained enthusiasm. He successfully makes the reader *feel* what a good time his party will have at "Ocean Nook." He appeals both to reason and to feeling—the suggestion of feeling running thru the letter like a subtle fire.

This same reason-feeling principle applies to the other elements of a mail campaign—to the circulars and the catalogs. Everything should be based on logic, but contain the feeling appeal. The letter sheet for example—the letterhead, the spacing, the paragraphing, etc.—should be made attractive in form. Whether illustrated or not, it should please the eye and be an agreeable thing

to read—it should make the right appeal to the reader's feelings.

The Need for Constant Carefulness. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that circular letters are great money-makers when they are wisely used—and great money wasters when they are not. Constant study of every detail of the process is necessary for success. A product or a list of names may grow old in three months, and may be good in the winter and bad in the spring. One plan may succeed in the West or North and fail in the East or South. It may attract men and repel women. A letter that makes record sales for one product may fail completely with another.

Successful circular-letter campaigns are based upon definitely known facts; not upon anybody's unsupported opinions.

Don't use a list that somebody says is good, but examine it in detail and make sure that it is what it pretends to be. Don't use letter copy merely because it sounds good to you or to an experienced friend, but test it on a small list of names and make sure.

And even then a campaign may fail, because there are always factors that cannot be foreseen by anyone. Conducting a letter campaign is like driving an auto thru a rocky canyon at midnight—success requires all the lights going and both hands on the wheel!

* * * * *

In the next executive manual we shall develop our ability to write letters that enter into general business correspondence; and we shall see that many of the principles applied in writing successful selling letters also apply in writing effective business letters of other kinds. Furthermore, our ability to write successful sales letters will be further improved in our study of other kinds of letters—for the fundamental principles that underlie the writing of all kinds of effective letters are the same. Executive Problem 80, which follows, offers you another interesting and profitable experience in letter writing.

CHECK-UP ON PRINCIPLES

Use the following check-up to get the principles of this manual firmly fixed in mind. This will help you to handle the problem which follows. This check-up is entirely for your own personal use, so you need not send it in to the University.

	Check	
	Yes	No
In Part I of this executive manual, six letters by sales managers are quoted. All are written in natural language, free from "business lingo," but the second, fifth, and sixth are somewhat dignified, while the first, third, and fourth are very familiar—almost slangy. Do you think the familiar letters would have been more effective if more dignity had been used?		
If you have ever answered a sales advertisement, did you find that your letter was promptly, intelligently, and attractively answered?		
When a correspondent in a large house is told that he could make much better letters by putting more thought into them, he often replies: "True, but more thought means more time, and the work takes all my time as it is." Do you consider this a conclusive answer?		
A publisher is considering selling a \$5 book by direct mail. Tests show that he can get 5 per cent orders with a single letter costing \$50 a thousand. If other expenses are disregarded, will the letter bring orders at a reasonable cost (not more than 25 per cent)?		
You are a new sales correspondent. The head of your department gives you a list of the dealers in your territory with the remark that "It's been pretty carefully made up." Would you be safe in using the list without investigation?		
A bank is planning a series of letters to get new depositors. The publicity man decides on the following plan for the six letters: Letters to be sent 1 week apart { 1. Value of the saving habit. 2. Importance of selecting a good bank. 3. Value of efficient, sympathetic service. 4. History of this bank. 5. Its policies. 6. Personal invitation to come in and get acquainted. Is this a good plan?		

	Check	
	Yes	No
Can you distinguish the three selling points in the three coffee letters on page 28?		
Does the writer of the following letter seem to know his product and feel real enthusiasm for it? There's romance everywhere, and there's adventure a'plenty—even in the pump business. This morning, a large consignment of pumps starts forth on a long, long journey. There are twenty machines all told, and they will travel together as far as Calcutta, India. Thence, each will be dispatched to accomplish the duty for which it has been destined. One will deliver water to the rooms of a modern hotel in Calcutta; another will irrigate a vast area of sun-scorched field; while another goes deep, deep into the interior to do—Lord knows what. And they will work faithfully and well. Like the dauntless men who preceded them; and succeeded against countless hardships, they are made of the right kind of stuff. They are "Chicago" pumps!		
The letter just quoted is the first of a series. Does it make the reader feel like reading the ones that are to follow?		
Some people have doubted that the "baby" letter on page 35 was really written by a man. Do you see any signs of a man's hand?		
Here is the beginning of a letter used by a hat store. A very small circular was inclosed. Is it good or not? Here's a straw hat that you'll want to wear, not only because it looks so well, but because it feels so well on your head. You'll never have to take it off when it's unusually warm—it won't bind—because it can't. It's the Dunlap "Metropolitan"—a stylish, stiff brim straw that has all the comfort of a Panama.		

Executive Problem 80

COMPOSING A SELLING LETTER

Selecting Appropriate Selling Appeals and Framing Them as a Letter

UNDER THE LASALLE PROBLEM METHOD



THE modern reader of form letters, particularly if he is a dealer, has no time for just words. He wants the facts, and he wants them to be told logically. He wants to know how a proposition is going to benefit him, and where and how much. He has no time to wade thru commonplace talk or stilted phrases.—
J. George Frederick.



Prepared by the Research and Consultation Staff of LaSalle Extension University from an interesting problem which it has carefully investigated and analyzed.

Executive Problem 80

COMPOSING A SELLING LETTER

Here is a perfectly clean-cut problem in selling.

Most sales problems are complicated by accidental circumstances. Usually there are jobbers and dealers to be considered. There are the salesmen to be taken into account. Old customers have to be reckoned with, and so on. But in this case the whole thing was as simple as it could well be. It was the sales problem of the Western Slot Machine Company.

This company makes "coin-operated machines"—the machines that stand in retail stores, on railway platforms, and in other places. By dropping a cent or a nickel in one of these, you get your "correct" weight or you get a stick of chewing gum, or a bar of chocolate, or a handful of peanuts. The sales problem was to sell these machines to retail stores.

It is true that there was a good deal of competition. Other firms manufacturing similar machines had worked the same territory again and again. It was difficult to show any very decided superiority in the machines operated by this company—or at least it was difficult to make the customer feel these points so strongly that he was willing to pay a slightly higher price for a superior article.

The campaign that we are to consider was confined to a single type of machine, an automatic scale. The scale was well constructed, and the readings were reliable. It did not easily get out of order, and it required no attention beyond the taking out of the accumulated coins at the end of a day or a week.

It was decided to get up a circular letter which could be sent out to all the retail stores in a certain territory. This letter was made by an expert mail salesman and was

very successful. It introduced the machine in a great number of stores at very small cost to the manufacturer.

Before you are shown the actual letter in the executive report, you are to try writing it according to your own ideas. There are a number of things to be considered:

1. What is to be the central thought of this letter? It will not do to scatter the reader's attention over a number of advantages; a single point must be played up strongly so that it will linger in the reader's mind and produce action. Other things may be brought in incidentally, but the one point must be made supreme. Here are several ideas from which you may choose:

- (a) The superiority of this particular machine. A number of new patents have been used in its construction which make it practically impossible for the machine to get out of order and render its reading unusually accurate. The machine is constructed on the balance principle and does not use springs. Springs are unreliable things because they tend to stretch gradually as they are used. Balances on the other hand can be relied upon as long as there is no appreciable friction. To get away from the friction, it is necessary to have the moving part rest upon a knife blade which must be made of the hardest steel, properly tempered to resist wear. These precautions have been taken in the machines made by this company, and the results are probably as reliable as they can be in any machine that is not constantly tested and adjusted. To any reader who has a mechanical turn of mind, this explanation should be convincing.
- (b) Another advantage that may be played up is the comparatively small investment (\$125, a first payment of \$25 and ten monthly payments of \$10 each). The proceeds from the machine are said to be from \$2 to \$10 a week, which is of course a very liberal return from so small an amount.
- (c) A third point is the ease with which the whole thing can be done. The storekeeper advances \$25, the machine is delivered. The succeeding monthly payments should be more than covered by the receipts. No attention need be given to the machine except for the removal of the coins at regular intervals.
- (d) The machines should not merely make money directly but should bring some customers into the store. Some people have a habit of weighing themselves several times a week. If they know that the scale is in the store, they will stop

in for that purpose and often buy things that they see there.

- (e) Every machine is sold on a guarantee. If at the end of a week the customer is not satisfied, he may return it and his money will be refunded.

2. The first thing that will strike you about the actual letter is that it is very human. The writer evidently understands exactly how the storekeeper feels about such things and how the public feels. He pictures the motives that lead the average person to weigh himself on one of these machines. He suggests the satisfaction of the proprietor when he pockets the money. His tone is that of easy good nature rather than of strenuous sales effort.

3. He uses very simple language. There is nothing of the pompous formality of ordinary business correspondents, and on the other hand there is no attempt to be sensational. Yet the style is animated, direct, and lively.

Keeping these points in mind, imagine yourself the mail salesman for a firm of this kind and make a letter to storekeepers. Pick out first your central idea (either one of those suggested or some other) and try to drive this home with the greatest clearness and force. Never forget that you are to discuss the storekeeper's side of the question rather than your own. Do not make the common mistake of bragging or getting too much interested in the fortunes of your own business. *His* business is the only thing that interests him.





